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May  
2008

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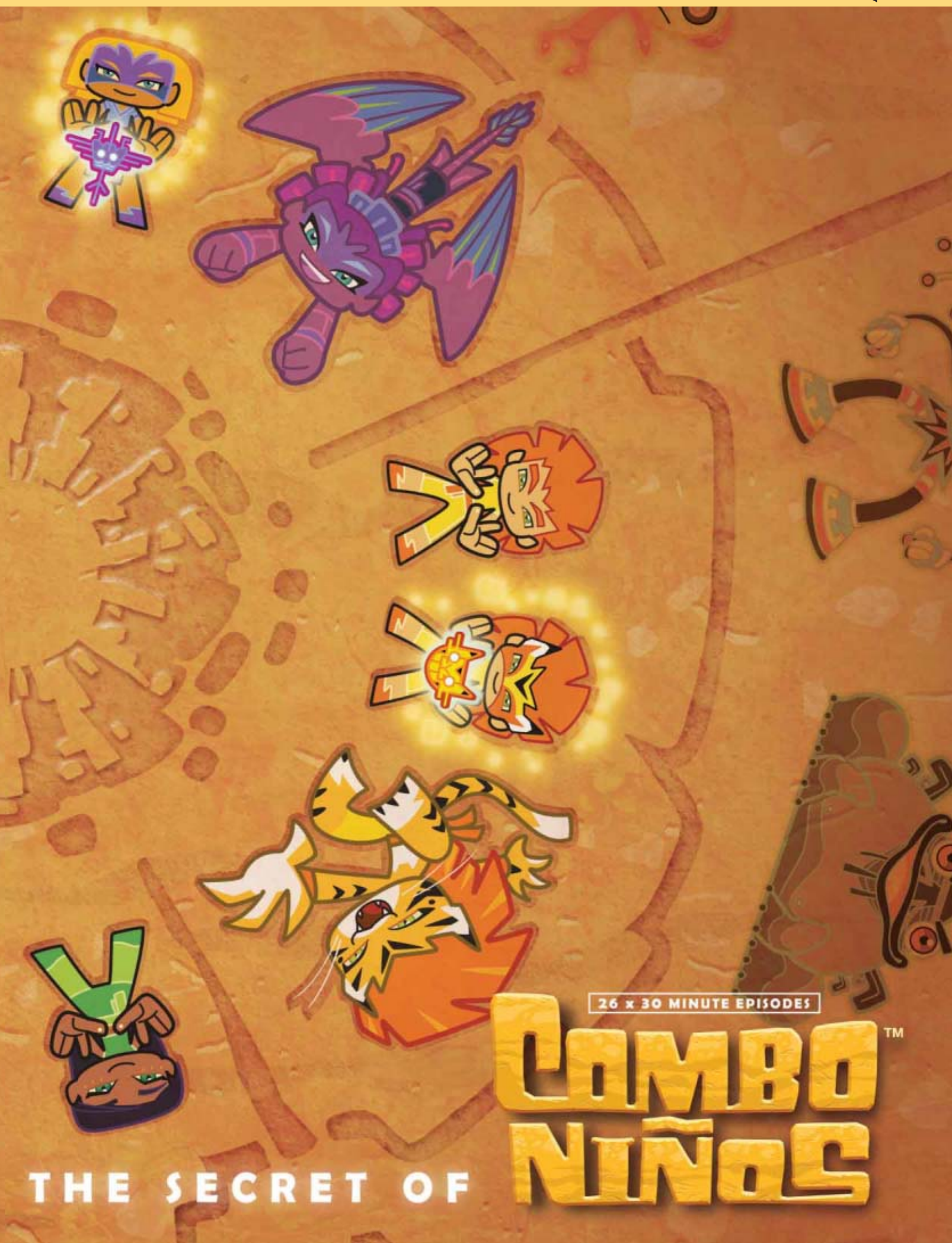
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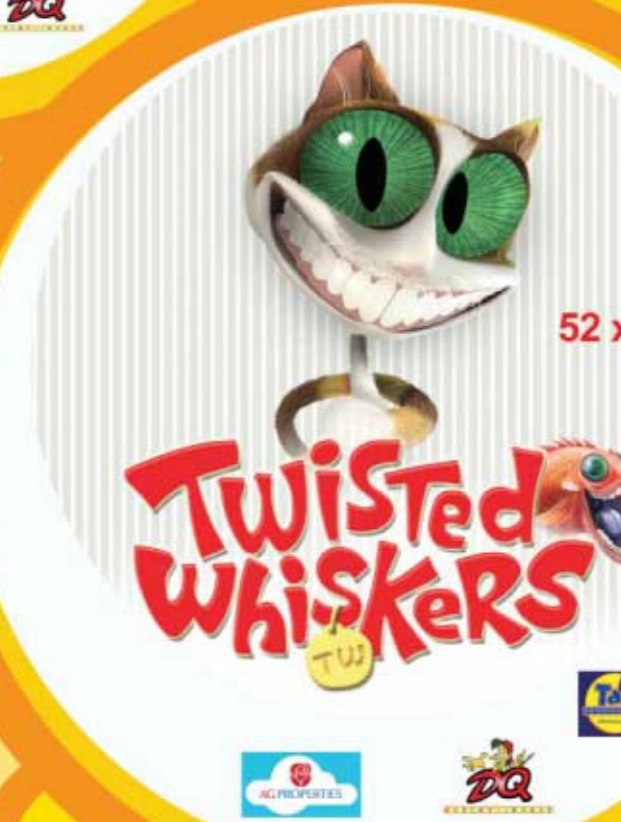
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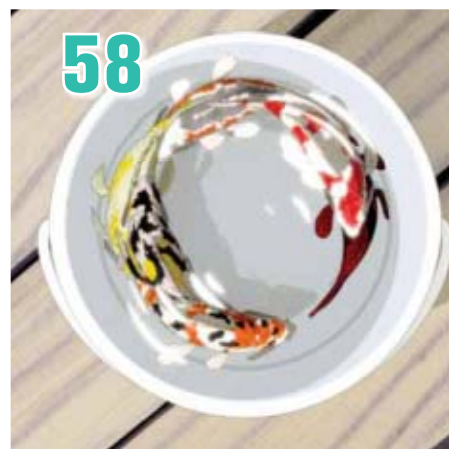
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**Cover:** Nickelodeon's *The Mighty B!* introduces kids to a feisty Honeybee scout who has the best of intentions.

**MIPTV Cover:** Timoon Animation hits the MIPTV market with a new CG-animated series called *My Giant Friend*.





Some weeks, we get bombarded by so many crazy animation-related stories here at the office that we become momentarily paralyzed! Right now, I'm staring at my computer screen trying to decide whether to write about how Fox/Blue Sky set the record for this year's biggest weekend opening with its beautifully animated *Horton Hears A Who!* (\$45.1 million is nothing to sneeze at, folks!) or mention how every *Star Wars* fan is hoping the new animated series/movie based on the property is going to get it right when it hits theaters this August!

Friends who have seen the new production of Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George* are raving about the revival's wonderful use of animation. For this production, Sam Buntrock has incorporated some clever animated effects, created by Timothy Bird and the Knifedge Creative Network. Since the acclaimed musical deals with the complex relationship between an artist and his/her muse, it's really appropriate to see this great usage of animation on Broadway.

We also found out this month that everyone's favorite pop music train wreck Britney Spears' new music video "Break the Ice" would have been animated. Yes, kids, you can now check out an anime version of the troubled song vixen, which takes off where her innovative "Toxic" music video left off. Although fans of *Aeon Flux* and *Ghost in the Shell* are pulling out their hair in disgust, we think the whole development shows another great use for animation. When the going gets tough, the star MUST get animated.

Meanwhile, back on Earth, some religious groups who have nothing better to do with their time are up in arms against Russia's adult cartoon channel 2X2. Both Muslim and Christian watchdog groups are claiming that shows like *South Park*, *Happy Tree Friends* and *The Adventure of Big Jeff* are promoting homosexuality, violence and religious intolerance! The brave folks at 2X2 aren't giving up, though. They brushed off the criticism and pointed out that their audience is mostly men aged 16 to 30, not children. It all brings back memories of the insane times we had when poor *SpongeBob*, *Buster* and *Tinky Winky* were in the hot seat here in the U.S.

To get our minds off the growing power of these fanatic mobs around the world, we like to remind everyone that in a few months, Universal Studios (in Hollywood and Florida) will be opening their brand new *Simpsons Ride*. Our spies in Florida report that a huge Krusty the Clown head is being constructed at the park's premises. Wouldn't it be great if we could put all the complaining masses on one of these rides this summer? Nobody can really stay mad at animated characters after slurping down a few Quickie Mart squishies. As creator Matt Groening explained to the press a few months ago, "The ride is designed to duplicate the *Simpsons* home-viewing experience, only at high speed and with lots of screaming." Along with *Indiana Jones*, *WALL•E*, *Speed Racer* and *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, that's one more reason we—the geeks of the world—can't wait for summer this year! Bring it on, Matt!



Ramin

Ramin Zahed  
Editor-in-Chief  
[rzahed@animationmagazine.net](mailto:rzahed@animationmagazine.net)

## Quote of the Month

"My movies are the three top box-office films Belgium has ever created, and yet, even here, no one really knows who I am."



—Director Ben Stassen, whose 3-D-animated feature *Fly Me to the Moon* (about three houseflies stranded aboard Apollo 11) opens in the theaters on August 22.

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[Info@animationmagazine.net](mailto:Info@animationmagazine.net)

President Jean Thoren  
Publisher Jodi Bluth  
Accounting Jan Bayouth  
Webmaster Eric Brandenburg

EDITORIAL [Edit@animationmagazine.net](mailto:Edit@animationmagazine.net)

Editor-in-Chief Ramin Zahed  
Web and Gaming Editor Ryan Ball  
Contributing Editors Chris Grove, Ron Magid,  
Barbara Robertson  
Editorial Assistant Mercedes Milligan  
Animation Art Advisor Ron Barbagallo  
Digital Reviews Editor Todd Sheridan Perry  
Contributors Scott Dyer, Lisa Goldman,  
Roland Kelts, Robby London,  
Thomas J. McLean, Jeffrey Scott,  
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Art and Production Director Susanne Rector

CIRCULATION [Circ@animationmagazine.net](mailto:Circ@animationmagazine.net)

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**For Information Contact:**

Kirk Bloomgarden  
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Global Sales  
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## The Animation Planner

# May

**1-6** Take in the best of the toon world at the **Stuttgart Int'l Festival of Animated Film** this week in Germany ([www.itfs.de](http://www.itfs.de)).



**2** Watch Robert Downey Jr. crush the competition in director Jon Favreau's **Iron Man**, which blasts into theaters today.

**5-8** Cutting-edge vfx and animation are spotlighted at the world-famous **fmX** conference in Stuttgart, Germany ([www.fmx.de](http://www.fmx.de)).



**6** **Avatar: The Last Airbender—Book 3: Fire, Vol. 3** will offer 125 more minutes of the awesome Nickelodeon show on DVD. Other cool releases today include **Naruto Uncut Boxed Set Vol. 7**, **Speed Racer The Next Generation: The Beginning** and **Mystery Science Theater 3000: The Movie**.



**7-9** Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif., hosts the **Art Center Design Conference: Serious Play** ([artcenter.edu/designconference](http://artcenter.edu/designconference)).



**7-13** Check out the cool shorts and feature discoveries at this year's



**AniFest** in the Czech town of Trebon ([www.anifest.cz](http://www.anifest.cz)).

**9** The Wachowski brothers' live-action adaptation of the popular anime series **Speed Racer** hits the cinematic track today.



**13** Get your DVD dose of the crass and crude with **Drawn Together—Uncensored: Season Three** and **Shin Chan Season 1 Part 1**. If you're in a retro mood,



pick up **The Galaxy Rangers Collection, Vol. 1**.

**13-15** Online game development comes under sharp focus at the **ION Game Conference** in Seattle, Washington ([www.ionconference.com](http://www.ionconference.com)).



**14-25** Movie stars, filmmakers and buyers are drawn to the French Riviera for another edition of the **Cannes Film Festival** ([www.festival-cannes.fr/en](http://www.festival-cannes.fr/en)).



**15-18** You can always find some cool animated projects at **Portland's Women's Film Festival** held in Washington this week ([www.powfest.com](http://www.powfest.com)).



**16** The summer visual effects fireworks get an early start with Andrew Adamson's second chapter in the **Chronicles of Narnia** series titled **Prince Caspian**.

**17** Keep your adrenaline pumping for five straight films with the new **Marvel Heroes Collection** DVD set out today.



**20** Fuzzy Fozzie Bear is on the cover of the new DVD release, **The Muppet Show: The Complete Third Season**! Other titles out this week: **Robot Chicken: Star Wars**, **Bleach, Vol. 10: The Entry**, **The Richie Rich/Scooby Doo Hour: The Complete Series, Vol. One** and **Pokémon: Adventures on the Orange Islands**.



**22** You must be living under a rock if you don't have today blocked as the premiere date of Spielberg's **Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull**. Expect star quality from Harrison Ford, Cate Blanchett, Shia LaBeouf and Karen Allen who are rocking this fourth Indy movie.



**23-25** Yes, it's time for three days of fantasy/comic-book/anime/nerd fun at the **Florida Supercon** in Weston ([www.floridasupercon.com](http://www.floridasupercon.com)).



**27** Get a head start on your Memorial Weekend festivities with **Dragon Ball Z, Season 5**, **He-Man and the Masters of the Universe, Vol. 2** or **One Piece, Season One—First Voyage**, all of which are out on DVD today!



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail [mercedes@animationmagazine.net](mailto:mercedes@animationmagazine.net).



## Books We Love

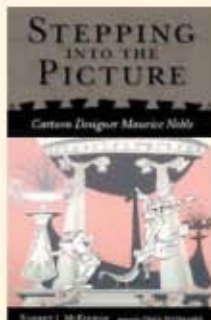


### Stepping into the Picture: Cartoon Designer Maurice Noble

By Robert McKinnon

[University Press of Mississippi, \$20]

In his forward to Robert J. McKinnon's wonderful book about the life and career of animation designer Maurice Noble, *Powerpuff Girls* creator Craig McCracken calls him "part of the DNA of animation." Those of us who have admired his handiwork in classics such as *What's Opera, Doc?*, *Duck Dodgers in the 24 1/2th Century* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* know exactly what he means. McKinnon does a fantastic job of painting a clear picture of this amazing man's life and art. The book begins with a great story about Noble's early display of his talents in his second-grade class in 1917 (he delights his classmates and teacher by drawing a huge chalk Christmas tree on the blackboard) and doesn't stop impressing until the very final page which closes the chapter on his life. There are numerous anecdotes—from Noble's experiences of working on Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and collaborating with Chuck Jones, Theodor Geisel and Frank Capra—as well as 16 full-color pages of sketches and concept paintings from his illustrious career. Now that's exactly what a glimpse into the DNA of genius is all about.

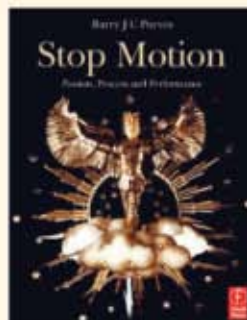


### Stop Motion: Passion, Process and Performance

By Barry J C Purves

[Focal Press, \$44.95]

In 1989, Barry Purves made a huge splash in the stop-motion scene with his jaw-dropping debut short, *Next*, in which William Shakespeare gives a quick run-through of all his plays in less than five minutes. The British animator, whose credits include the Oscar-nominated short *Screen Play* (1993) and TV shows such as *The Wind in the Willows*, *Hamilton Mattress* and *Fifi and the Flowertots* serves as our witty and knowledgeable guide in this tour of the art and craft of stop-motion filmmaking. Not only are there plenty of personal insights and a wealth of color illustrations and production shots, the book is also packed with really useful tips and sage advice. Naturally Purves' vision is more skewed toward British projects, but he also includes a healthy collection of interviews with international artists such as Adam Elliot, Saemi Takahashi and Randy Cook. Passionate, exquisite and valuable in both form and content, Purves' pièce de résistance is truly a volume to treasure. ■



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## For Mature Auds Only!

If you like your animation dark, erotic and mature, fused with sci-fi elements, then you'll be happy to know that there's a new feature based on the comics mag **Heavy Metal** in development at Paramount. Consisting of eight or nine different segments, the movie will be



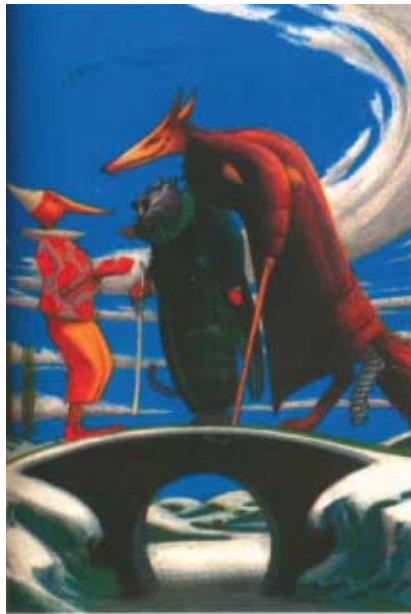
helmed by **David Fincher** (*Zodiac*, *Fight Club*) and will have different directors tackling each section. **Kevin Eastman**, co-creator of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and owner and publisher of *Heavy Metal*, and Blur Studios' owner **Tim Miller** (*Gopher Broke*, *Rockfish*) are also involved as directors and producers.

Released theatrically in 1981, the original *Heavy Metal* film was directed by Gerald Potterton and featured the voices of Harold Ramis and SCTV alumni John Candy, Eugene Levy and Joe Flaherty. The pic became a cult favorite and was reissued in limited release by Columbia Pictures in 1996. The sequel *Heavy Metal 2000*, based on Eastman's graphic novel *The Melting Pot*,

debuted on home video eight years ago. An American version of the French publication *Métal Hurlant* (*Howling Metal*), *Heavy Metal* was first published in 1977. Over the years, the magazine introduced the works of such American artists and writers as H.R. Giger, Terrance Lindall, Robert Silverberg and Harlan Ellison. We're sure folks who have been hungry for more "mature" animation on the big screens are happy that Fincher is overseeing this anthology.

## When You Wish Upon a Star (Ancora)

Carlo Collodi's famous tale of the little wooden toy who dreams of becoming a real boy is going to be made into an animated movie—again! Yes, although Disney's classic 1940 version of **Pinocchio** is definitely hard to beat, a new 2D animated feature is currently in development in Italy, co-produced by Cometafilm (Italy), Iris Productions (Luxembourg), Walking the Dog (Belgium) and 2D3D Animations (France). Noted animation director **Enzo d'Alo** is at the helm of this promising project, which aims to be darker in spirit and truer to the original source material than the Disney feature. And, yes, that means instead of the Blue Fairy, our hero is assisted by the Girl with Blue Hair! (Don't worry! Pinocchio's nose still grows when he chooses to lie.) Judging from the film's early sketches, this handsome production is going to be one to look out for in the next couple of years.



## Top of the Toon Discs

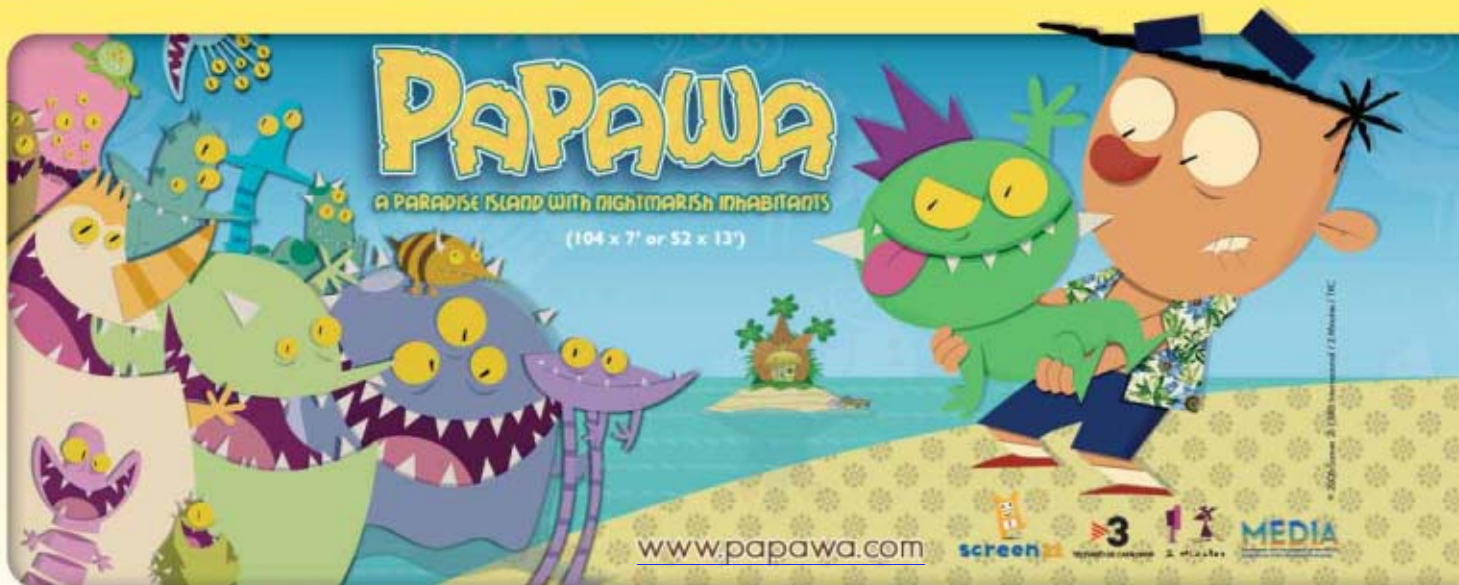
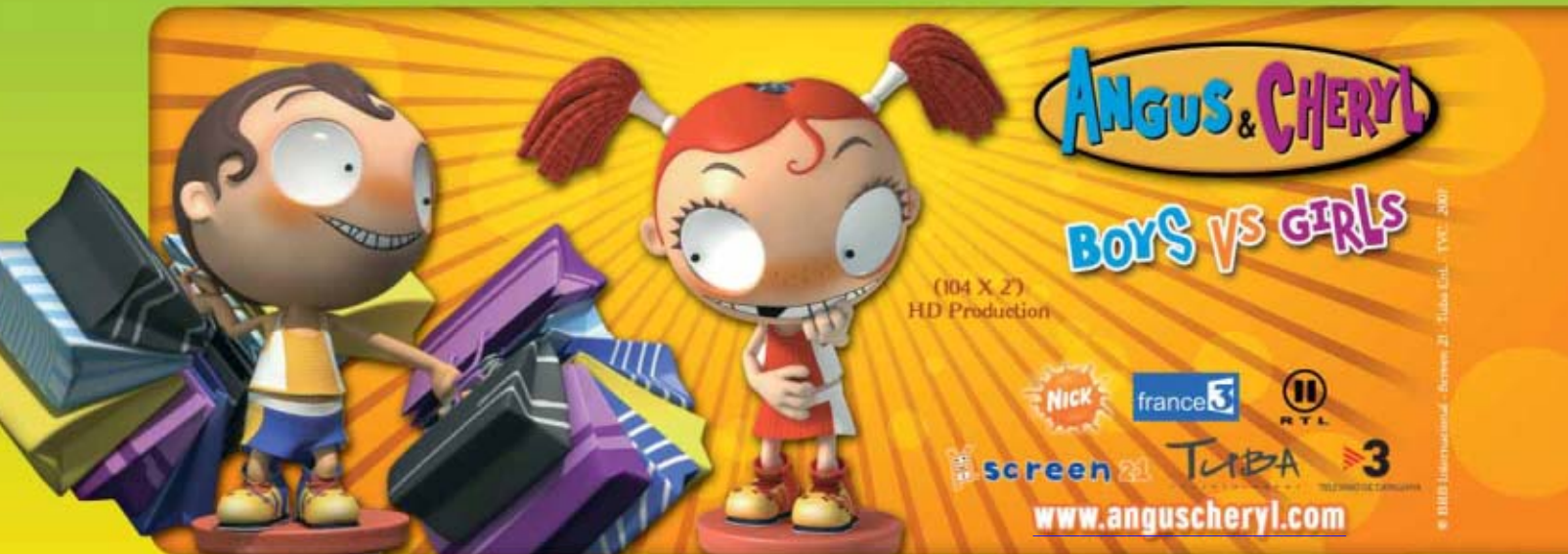
The following DVDs were on top of the [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) bestseller list in March:

1. 101 Dalmatians (Disney)
2. Enchanted (Disney)
3. Bee Movie (Paramount)
4. Beowulf (Sony)
5. Appleseed Ex Machina (Warner Bros.)
6. The Aristocats (Disney)
7. Barbie Mariposa and Her Butterfly Friends (Universal)
8. The Smurfs—Season One, Vol. One (Warner Bros.)
9. Justice League: The New Frontier (Warner Bros.)
10. South Park—Imaginationland (Paramount)

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), 3/15/08







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# Anime Pirates, Unlimited Adventure

Namco Bandai Games brings *One Piece* to Wii  
by Ryan Ball

Writer/illustrator Eiichiro Oda's manga series, *One Piece*, has successfully made the leap from the pages of *Shonen Jump* to the small screen with a popular television show produced by Toei Animation and broadcast around the world. Now would-be pirate king Monkey D. Luffy and the rest of his Straw Hat gang have brought their distinctive, Eastern brand of swashbuckling to Nintendo's Wii console with *One Piece: Unlimited Adventure*. Developed by Ganbarion Co., Ltd. and published by Namco Bandai, the title aims to have land-loving fans interacting with these seafaring characters like never before.

When a massive island rises from the depths of the ocean and grounds their pirate ship, Luffy and crew find themselves stranded in a strange land. It's up to the player to assume the role of any of the Straw Hat Pirates to explore these new surroundings, tangle with powerful enemies, search for treasure and discover the hidden powers the island possesses.

Swinging their Wii remote nunchucks like swords, fans can play through an all-new *One Piece* storyline in Adventure Mode, test their skills in Survival Mode or engage in Team Battle with a friend. Every character has a number of special moves to master, and unlockable elements include three different costumes for each of the eight Straw Hats and 40 different playable characters available in VS. Mode or Survival Mode.

Ganbarion director Hirofumi Irie



tells us the development team set out to give players the greatest amount of freedom to play the game their way. Switching between the various playable characters is an option, but it isn't necessary in order to finish the game. If someone wants to, they can stick with one certain avatar from start to finish.

Irie also says staying true to the established *One Piece* universe was

made easy with the help of members of the creative team behind the animated series, who were on hand to ensure that the storyline and characters meshed with the manga and TV incarnations. Translating the artistic sensibilities of the 2D show to a 3D environment would prove a bit trickier.

"We did our best to make the best looking cut scenes possible for the 2D part of the game," Irie notes. "However, there were 2D items that were difficult to portray in 3D. But thanks to the skills and experience of our team, the game is at a level where the character portrayal is as close to the series as possible."

Irie believes fans will respond strongly to the fact that the entire world of *One Piece* can be found within the game. He remarks, "One Piece is a very unique license in which you can find comedy, battles, tragedies and much more in a single package. One of our challenges was to see how we could introduce many unique characters into the storyline. By incorporating the 'Orb,' a key item that opens sealed paths, we were able to easily bring a good majority of them into this game world."

The Wii console allows gamers to get into that world in very unique ways. In addition to mimicking sword slashes and other battle moves, players can use the nunchuck remote for fishing, bug catching, digging and other activities that make use of the motion-sensing technology.

***One Piece: Unlimited Adventure* is rated T for Teen due to some cartoon violence, mildly salty language and some rum references—par for the course pirate stuff. Visit the official game site at [www.one-piece.namcobandagames.com](http://www.one-piece.namcobandagames.com), and learn more about the animated series at [www.toei-anim.com](http://www.toei-anim.com).** ■



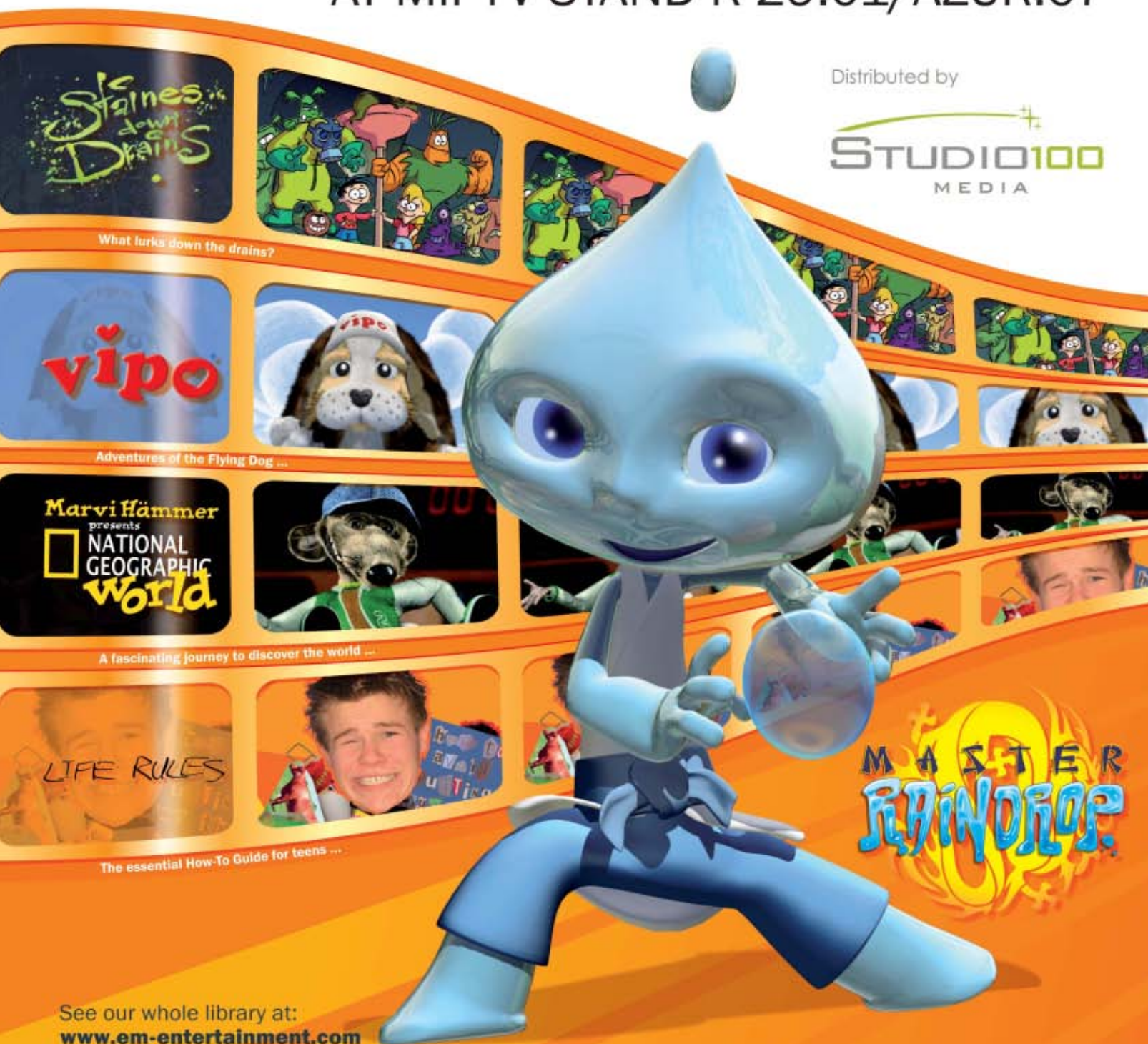




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# When Patapons Attack!

SCEA's *Patapon* for PSP battles to the beat of a different drummer. **by Ryan Ball**



**A**dorable, diminutive Cyclops creatures unleash their warrior spirits to defeat the evil Zigoton army and reclaim their homeland in *Patapon*, a unique new rhythm-based, side-scrolling PSP title from Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA). To help the Patapon tribe prevail, gamers must master up to six different drum beats that will lead an army of their own creation in strategic battle against dragons, giant worms and other imposing bosses. With a visual style by renowned French graphic artist Rolito, the game is as much fun to look at as it is to play. But was it also fun to make? To find out, we spoke with Christian Hinojosa-Miranda, one of the game's producers.

**Animation Magazine:** So tell us how this crazy game was conceived.

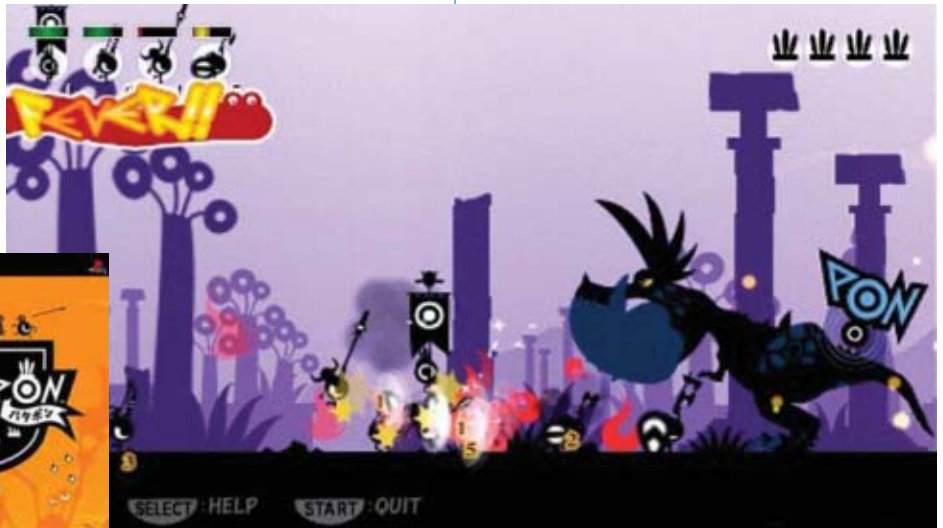
**Christian Hinojosa-Miranda:** Hiroyuki Kotani, *Patapon*'s game designer, happened to come across Rolito's website. Kotani-san saw Rolito's designs and instantly fell in love. He knew right away that these would serve as a perfect foundation for a future game and proceeded to get in touch with Rolito's people to figure out how to start off this collaboration. Back then, the Patapon's were nameless creatures existing only in Rolito's head and website.

**Why is PSP the ideal platform for the game?**

**C.H.M.:** I think it starts with the way the team has created a title that is "genre-free," successfully executing elements of various themes: RPG, rhythm and music, character-based, casual and hardcore. This sort of amorphous style lets a player enjoy *Patapon* at their leisure, be it during their commute, at home or with friends. Each level takes around 15 minutes to complete, which is about as much time as a casual gamer will put into a game at one time, though the

story is so deep that they will come back for more. Then you have the hardcore gamers who will play through various chapters at one go. The PSP offers that sort of time/location flexibility that could not be replicated otherwise.

Many have expressed an interest in having *Patapon* become a PS3 title, in HD, etc. However, the original concept was created with the PSP in mind, so all the gameplay



and features were created for that particular environment. Sure, it could be ported, but at the sacrifice of what? Rolito's art looks perfect on a PSP screen.

**What was the most challenging part of the development process?**

**C.H.M.:** In the end, having teams working in all parts of the world (Rolito is in France, Kotani-san in Japan and SCEA here in the U.S.) was the hardest part. Time zones can be a bit erratic when it comes down to crunch time, but that was just the nature of the project. In the end, everyone was very excited to be part of this experience. Rolito is very close to his characters and Kotani-san has always held true to his vision, something that I feel shows through in each level of *Patapon*—a genuine feeling that helps the play-

er feel like they are part of something, as opposed to just playing a game.

**Explain how the rhythm-based gameplay works.**

**C.H.M.:** *Patapon* is all about maintaining a proper beat. As "The Mighty One," this is the only way to communicate with them. For example, to get the Patapons to march, you must press circle, circle, circle, square. Combine this with the attack, defend and retreat commands and you have yourself a battalion full of spear wielding, axe waving eyeball warriors ready to follow your lead toward Earthend.

The Patapons are not all about war, though. You'll be able to play through various musical mini-games such as the one involving Pan the Pakapon, a talented horn player who must play to Ubbo Bon's singing

in order to score some special items.

**What do you think gamers will enjoy the most about the game?**

**C.H.M.:** There are so many different enjoyable elements to *Patapon* that I feel it would be unfair to say "this is it." In the end, Kotani-san, [Adachi] Kemmei, Rolito and everyone on the development team all worked hard to create a new gaming experience on all levels, and I feel that they have done just that. Everything about *Patapon*, from the music and the unique control mechanism to the character design and the underlying story make for a complete package. ■

***Patapon* is now available exclusively for Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP). A demonstration of the gameplay and animation can be viewed on AniMagTV ([www.animag.tv](http://www.animag.tv)).**



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PRODUCTION







# Anime Embraces the Anthology Format

Studio4°C's sublime *Genius Party* collections offer wide-ranging aesthetic visions from some of the top talents working in the medium today.

by Roland Kelts

**E**iko Tanaka, president and co-founder of Tokyo-based Studio4°C, likes to joke about being a lone female in an industry dominated by male executives, producers and artists. "When I go to anime conventions, I have to check my face in the mirror," she says, smiling. "Everyone there is a man so I figure I must be one, too."

Tanaka is an anime industry maverick—and for more than just her gender. Studio4°C, named after the temperature at which water freezes at maximum density, was co-founded by Tanaka in 1986 with anime directors Koji Morimoto and Yoshiharu Sato. Their goal was to put the art and the artists first, to maximize creative expression and encourage imaginative leaps of faith. "Seen from the outside, anime can sometimes seem like a single, monolithic entity," Tanaka says. "But the environment here [in Japan] has generated as many different styles as there are directors."

In the two decades since its founding, the studio has become a kind of "big tent" for the medium's most inventive and dedicated talents, producing such dazzling features as *Mind Game* (2004) and *Tekkon Kinkreet* (2006), and mind-bending short film collections like Katsuhiro Ôtomo's *Memories* (1995)

and the *Matrix*-inspired *The Animatrix* (2003). Veteran giants Ôtomo of *Akira* fame and art director Shinji Kimura (*Steamboy*) work alongside younger creators, and the studio's collaborative, free-form approach to anime filmmaking has resulted in award-winning music videos for pop musicians like Linkin Park, Hikaru Utada and Ken Ishii.

But its two latest releases, the film anthologies *Genius Party* and *Genius Party Beyond*, mark the studio's most ambitious and broadly catholic efforts to date.

The first *Genius Party* debuted in Japan last July. Featuring installments from seven directors with wide-ranging aesthetic visions, the imagery throughout is captivating, drawing upon conventionally *kawaii* (hyper-cute) and disturbingly psychedelic graphics with equal aplomb. Atsuko Fukushima's eponymous opener examines the birth of images; Shinji Kimura's contribution, "Deathtic 4," takes place in an alternate world ruled by the deceased. Other contributors include Shinichiro Watanabe ("Baby Blue"), director of *Cowboy Bebop* and *Samurai Champloo* and Shoji Kawamori ("Shanghai Dragon"), a director of the iconic *Macross* series.

The results are mesmerizing—and virtually impossible to summarize for easy

consumption. According to director Fukushima, that's at least part of the point.

"The *Genius Party* project is completely the opposite of the kind of approach where you first assume to target a certain audience, and then create the content to match," she says. "To me, the project is like an art gallery, full of ideas and possibilities from a cast of creators. Whether the viewers are already anime fans, or non anime fans, or even core *otaku*—they can all visit our gallery to find something they might like."

The second anthology, *Genius Party Beyond*, adds five more artists to the roster, including studio co-founder Morimoto and Kazuto Nakazawa, animation director of the anime segment in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* and for Linkin Park's "Breaking the Habit" music video.

Both *Genius Party* films had their world premieres in mid-February in Washington, D.C., as part of the Kennedy Center's two-week exhibition of Japanese creativity, "Japan! Culture + Hyper-Culture."

The only guiding principle offered by the studio was passion: Each contributor was asked to pull out the proverbial stops in bringing their original ideas to fruition—though Tanaka hastens to add that the bar for initial consideration was set exceptionally high. "We basically gathered the combined energies of directors who are able to skillfully manipulate their unique talents and qualities in the short film format," she says. "But they also had to be outstanding in each of their multiple talents—as writer, animator and director all rolled into one."

Taken together, the 12 films comprising the *Genius Party* anthologies are emblematic of the Japanese industry's comparatively auteur-driven approach to the animated medium. The absence of Hollywood-style focus groups and demographic-targeting strategies results in Japanese products that bear the indelible stamps of the individuals who created them, eccentricities and quirks intact, warts and all.



Eiko Tanaka



Atsuko Fukushima





Baby Blue

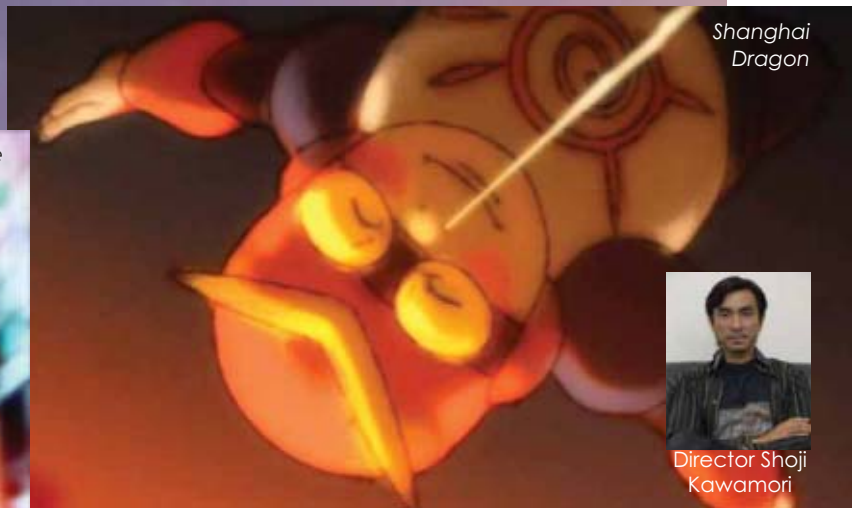


Director Shinichiro Watanabe



Limit Cycle

Director Hideki Futamura



Shanghai Dragon



Director Shoji Kawamori

An assessment of the soundtracks alone is telling. Fukushima's opening film is completely silent, Kawamori's begins in Chinese and Kimura's "Deathtic 4" employs mispronounced Swedish to evoke a European feel without the distraction of logical translation. The objective here is not merely to entertain, or even to be understood, but to engage the audience in a dialogue of the imagination, to which the art of animation is particularly well suited.

As Fukushima explains: "Instead of having the audience get immersed in a 'wonderful story' and go home feeling satisfied and simply happy, I'd rather have viewers carry home with them a lot of question marks and exclamation points still hanging in their minds."

Studio co-founder Tanaka started working in the industry producing titles for Studio Ghibli, the home of veteran giants Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata,

including the now-classic Miyazaki films *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*. Tanaka is emphatic about the uniqueness of the Japanese form of the animated art, noting that Japan's visual artists have always been more focused on the manipulation of lines—the outlines of shapes and forms—versus the Western emphasis on shading, the manipulation of light and shadow to achieve effects.

"Westerners have long been paying more attention to volume than to flat spaces," she adds. "But Japanese people know that no matter how much you change a shape, its fundamental elements are still there. No other country thinks this way."

The reliance upon limited or 2D animation, what artist Takashi Murakami has branded the "superflat" aesthetic, is a hallmark of anime, providing its artists with levels of freedom only dreamed of in the 3D- and CGI-obsessed U.S. As

Tanaka suggests, 2D may offer certain artistic advantages, giving the audience a more interactive experience with its "less is more" approach. But it definitely grants commercial freedoms: 2D is much less expensive to produce, providing the artists freer rein to take risks.

One Studio Ghibli employee sums it up bluntly: "You know why you never see a 'director's cut' of anime? Because what you see is the director's cut."

In Studio4C's tantalizing *Genius Party* anthologies, we get all twelve director's cuts, questions marks and exclamation points intact, from one of the most adventurous anime producers in the world. ■

**Roland Kelts is a journalist and author who lives in New York and Tokyo. He is the author of *Japanamerica: How Japanese Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (Palgrave Macmillan, \$14.95).**

For more info, visit [www.studio4c.co.jp/english](http://www.studio4c.co.jp/english).



# The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of the Latest Anime DVD Releases

by Charles Solomon



An outrageous satire of the sci-fi, giant robot and harem comedy genres, the broadcast series *Martian Successor Nadesico* (1996) was initially criticized in Japan for making fun of both anime and fan culture. But its freewheeling and ultimately good-natured silliness won over its critics—and large audiences on both sides of the Pacific.

In the year 2195 A.D., enemy "Jovian Lizards" are attacking Earth. Fed up with the ineptitude of the United Space Force, Nergal Heavy Industries builds and launches the super battleship *Nadesico*. State-of-the-art weapons aside, the *Nadesico* is clearly no ordinary vessel: The spaceships in *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* didn't provide crew jackets, ping-pong tables and vending machines (with recycling bins for empty cans).

To staff the ship, Nergal hires "top people who may have slight personality problems." The adjective "slight" is something of an understatement. The crew includes sardonic science officer Ruri Hoshino, lecherous old mechanic Seiya Uribatake and communications officer Megumi Reinard, a voice actress who once starred in *Natural Princess Magical Lychee*, a takeoff on *Sailor Moon*.

## Lovesick Captain

The less-than-heroic commander of the *Nadesico* is ditzy Captain Yurika Misamaru, whose life centers on her one-sided crush on Akito Tenkawa. Although he possesses exceptional skills as a robot-suit pilot, Akito signs on as a fry cook. Having been traumatized as a child when the Jovians attacked Mars, he refuses to fight. As Akito, voice actor Spike Spencer spoofs his performance as Shinji Ikari, the neurotic hero of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.

The relentlessly upbeat Gai Daigoji wins Akito over to the cause by showing him reruns of *Gekigangar III*, an outrageous send-up of *Gigantor*, *Get-*

*ter Robo*, *Voltron* and other giant robot shows of the '70s. Clips from *Gekigangar* ape the thumping disco-beat theme songs, xeroxed lines and cast relationships of the genre. Akito quickly turns into an über-geek, and his "solid metal casting limited edition collector's Gekigangar III" figure becomes his most prized possession. His passion for *Gekigangar* infects the rest of the crew: When morale falters, they stage a "Geki Fest" that satirizes anime cons, including cosplay events, marathon screenings, speakers and special merchandise.



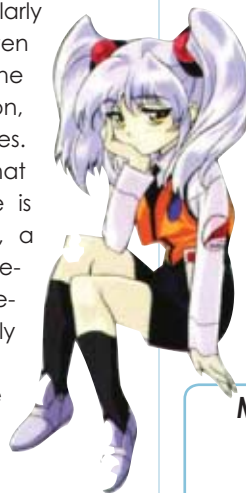
Although he's a singularly improbable hero, the often hysterical Akito becomes the boy every girl has a crush on, provoking numerous rivalries. Ruri dryly comments, "What began as a love triangle is now, by my calculations, a septagon." The mostly female crew pursues him relentlessly, with predictably disastrous results.

*Nadesico* reaches rare heights of absurdity in Episode 14, "Let's Go with Hot-Blooded Anime,"

as the casts of *Nadesico* and *Gekigangar* watch each other's programs, borrowing ideas for weapons and debating plot points. When *Gekigangar* pilot Akira complains that the day's episode of *Nadesico* is just a clip show that plays like an introduction, half-pint Junpei explains, "Don't you know, they always do this in the middle of animated series, so new viewers will know what's happening!" Joe, another pilot, disagrees: "I'll bet the studio was running behind schedule and they needed a quick filler episode." It's the kind of self-parody that we usually associate with American classics such as *Rocky* and *Bullwinkle* and *The Simpsons*.

Near the end of the series, Ruri comments, "I guess we'll be fumbling about, making noise 'til the end. However, when you think about it, that's rather appropriate for us." The sometimes fumbling script leaves big chunks of the plot unresolved, but Ruri suggests that some of them may be sorted out "in the inevitable sequel."

Sadly, there was no sequel: *Nadesico* only ran for 26 episodes. The subsequent feature *Nadesico: Prince of Darkness* (1998) proved to be a fragmented, difficult-to-follow dud, with precious little of the original's irreverent humor. (The *Gekigangar* 3 scenes were later re-cut into a 30-minute OAV, which has yet to be released in the U.S.) *Martian Successor Nadesico* (The DVD package includes three commentary tracks, character profiles and clean opening and ending sequences.) may not go down in history as a watershed series, but its take-no-prisoners insanity remains as funny today as it was when the program debuted a decade ago. ■



**Martian Successor Nadesico:  
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# Spring DVD Fever

Home toon entertainment is in bloom: New releases from Disney Classics, Fox and Universal. *by Mercedes Milligan*

## Alvin and the Chipmunks [Fox, \$29.99]

After raking in a nice chunk of change at the box office last year, this re-imagining of Ross Bagdasarian's fuzzy little trio, directed by Tim Hill (*SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Garfield: A Tale of Two Kitties*) and written by *Simpsons* alum Jon Vitti, is ready to take your home theater by storm. A zany chain of events—partly set off by Alvin's (Justin Long) antics—drops the CG chipmunks unexpectedly into the middle of struggling song writer Dave Seville's (*My Name is Earl*'s Jason Lee) life. Although Alvin, Simon (Matthew Gray Gubler) and Theodore (Jesse McCartney) spark Dave's creativity, their mischief puts a strain on the relationship. However, the



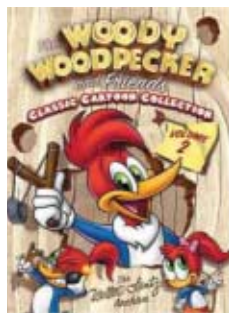
'munks manage to win skeptical record producer, Ian (David Cross), over with their vocal talents with Chipmunks classic "Christmas Don't Be Late."

But Ian's hot-shot managerial efforts drive a wedge between the starstruck chipmunks and cynical Dave ... Luckily, being adorable little CG animals in a family movie, Alvin and co. are successfully rescued by their adoptive pop and everything settles down ... Well, as much as it can when you live with "AAAAALVIIIIN!"

[Release Date: April 1]

## Woody Woodpecker and Friends Classic Cartoon Collection: Vol. 2 [Universal, \$39.99]

By the time you've worked your way through this jam-packed second volume, Woody's trademark laugh will be seared into your brain for life. Not that that's a bad thing! This set will add



45 awesomely audacious Woodpecker cartoons spanning the years 1952-1958 to your collection, as well as 30 additional previously unreleased Wal-

ter Lantz works featuring older characters like Pooch the Pup, Oswald Rabbit and Andy Panda. Some of Woody's adventures making their DVD debut are 1954's *Socko in Morocco* (directed by Don Patterson), in which our hero rescues a sultan's harem girl during a stint in the foreign legion; Alex Lovy toons *Woody Meets Davy Crewcut* and *To Catch a Woodpecker*, a hilarious standoff between a pole-pecking Woody and the irate phone company; and several more mad-cap Paul J. Smith works including *Jittery Jester*, *Box Car Bandit*, *Chief Charlie Horse* and *Helter Shelter*. Fondly remembered as one of the most politically incorrect characters of the era, Woody's antisocial antics continue to hold up to the standards of discerning deviants (like yours truly).

[Release Date: April 15]

## Walt Disney Classic Caballeros Collection [Buena Vista, \$19.99]

The latest Mouse House works to get the Classic treatment, the *Saludos Amigos* (1942)/*Three Caballeros* (1945) double feature is a must-have example of Disney's more exciting (and eccentric) work. Both movies are comprised of series of colorful, at times psychedelic, animated shorts. *Saludos* is strung together



by live-action footage of South America and Walt and his artists, presented as a travelogue. While *Saludos* keeps up a friendly, slapstick vibe with shorts like "Lake Titicaca" (Donald Duck as a hapless tourist) and "El Gaucho Goofy" (in the vein of a Goofy "How-To"), *Caballeros* features plenty of manic color changes, trippy shape-shifting and good ol' fashioned skirt-chasing. Bonus features include two Donald toons (*Don Donald*, *Contrary Condor*) and an on-location Disney artist docu featuring Mary Blair and others seeking inspiration in South America. With such an eclectic range, this disc is the perfect antidote for animated prissy-princess burnout.

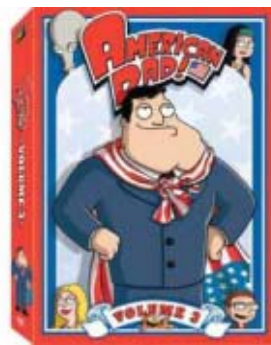
[Release Date: April 29]

## American Dad! Vol. 3 [Fox, \$39.98]

Television's favorite alien-harboring, communist-bashing, politically-imbalanced family is back with a new 3-disc volume chock full of non-pc farces and Seth McFarlane-style non sequiturs. Included in this set are the remaining 10 unreleased episodes from Season 2 (including "Bush Comes to Dinner," featuring a drunk cartoon Commander in Chief) plus eight of the first nine eps. from Season 3 ("The Most Adequate Christmas Ever" is passed over in favor of "Frannie 911"). Among the highlights on these discs is "Dope & Faith," in which family patriarch and hyper-patriot Stan thinks God has answered his prayers for a friend—but when his pal turns out to be an athiest, Stan recreates the trials of Job to try to stir up his faith; and it ain't pretty.

All episodes come with audio commentary, and more bonus features like table reads and deleted scenes give you plenty of so-wrong-it's-right comedy bang for your buck. Why not pick it up? *Don't you love America?*

[Release Date: April 15] ■





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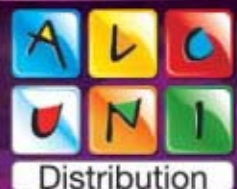
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# Flight of the Honeybee



Cynthia True

Amy Poehler, Cynthia True and Erik Wiese are buzzing about their new hilarious (and yes, heart-warming) animated series, *The Mighty B!* by Chris Grove

**W**hile many people's fantasy about hitting the big time involves the newfound ability to spend a fair amount of time doing nothing (or at least pretending to do something at Starbucks), not so for rising star Amy Poehler. Established TV career? Check. Burgeoning film credits? Roger that. Time to kick back? Not yet.

After seven increasingly high-profile years on *Saturday Night Live* (fueled lately by her dead-on impression of Hillary Clinton) and some very positive responses to her recent film roles, Poehler is expanding her reach, not standing pat. Next up for Poehler's gather-yerosebuds strategy: Nickelodeon's new animated comedy series *The Mighty B!*, for which she's not only co-creator and executive producer but also the voice of the eponymous heroine.

How does she manage it? "Two words," Poehler tells *Animation Magazine*, "'Time Machine.' My future self comes back to encourage my present self when I get tired and lose my way. My future self is always good at reminding my present self how great *Mighty B!* is and how proud I am of it. It also re-

minds me that I'll sleep when I'm dead."

Picked up for 20 episodes, *The Mighty B!* is centered on the life of Bessie Higgenbottom, the world's most ambitious and lovably unhinged 10-year-old "Honeybee" scout. As a member of the Honeybees, Bessie wears her uniform every single day, leads her troop with the kind of zeal General Patton would've admired and has earned more Bee Badges than any Honeybee in history.



But a bunch of badges still elude her, and Bessie's not stopping until she has every last one. When she achieves this goal, Bessie imagines that she'll be transformed into the mysterious and powerful superhero, *The Mighty Bee*. "She's an optimist and a realist," says Poehler, outlining what she thinks makes Bessie a unique character. "She has friends that are boys, but she doesn't want boyfriends. She's an outsider but still a leader. She embraces imperfection, eccentricity and inner awesomeness. She is not a cynic."



## Squeezing the Sponge

Co-created with Nickelodeon animation veterans Cynthia True and Erik Wiese, *The Mighty B!* has been given a high-profile, high-stakes time slot smack dab in the middle of Nick's Saturday morning ratings-machine block of *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *The Fairly OddParents*. "We're hoping for hit-it-out-of-the-park-dom on this one," says Brown Johnson, president of anima-



tion, Nickelodeon/MTVN Kids and Family Group. "We made this show to build another Saturday morning hit that'll appeal to a wide demographic."

While that won't include Nick Jr.'s two- to five-year old target, Nick execs hope *Mighty B!* will be adopted by more than just the core five- to eight-year old group that's the traditional focus for the network's animated fare. It's pretty well assured that older kids (eight- to 12-year-olds) that typically have moved on to live-action series will be attracted to the show's fast pace and what Johnson calls its "squishy and squashy" classic animation feel.

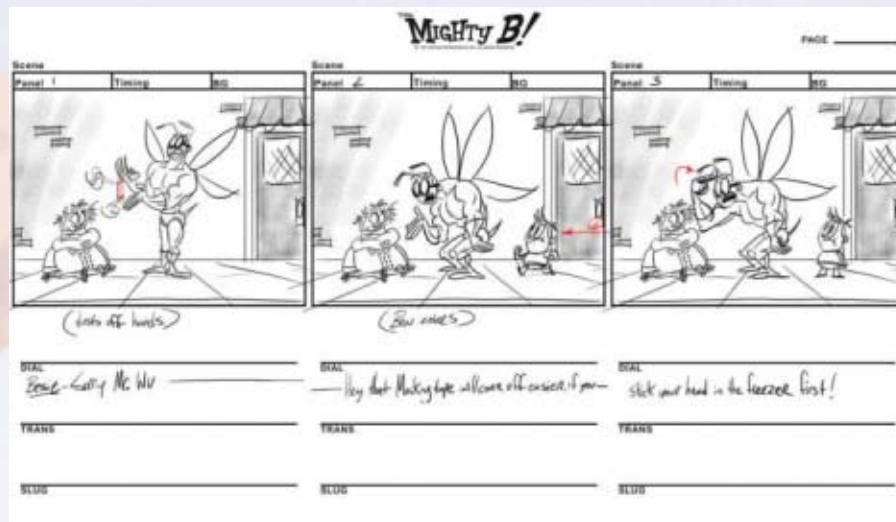
In addition to her first-time exec producer title, True also serves as story editor. The main character and the concept for the series have been gestating for over three years. "Amy and I were working on some feature ideas in the summer of 2004. And in the midst of that process my mother happened to send me a Polaroid of her as a seven-year old Brownie," True recalls. "She looked so proud and solemn in the photo, the idea of 'superhero Brownie' just kind of came up."

Poehler had previously created a Girl Scout character as a writer/per-

"We wanted some sense that this show is done by hand—that it's analog and feels alive. You don't see too much of that these days. We've gotten so slick that we've removed a lot of those special things that remind us that someone actually painted those backgrounds and drew the frames that make the characters act and come alive."

—Erik Wiese, co-creator of Nickelodeon's *The Mighty B!*

former on Comedy Central's *Upright Citizens Brigade*. "They had seen [the] character I did in my Comedy Central sketch show and thought she would be a good starting off point," Poehler recalls. "Like any good idea, things moved fast and organically." In fact, within a few weeks they had a rough pitch pulled together. "It was so much fun coming up with that stuff. It's rare that it just kind of flows like that," says Wiese.



### Saying No to Slick

Previously, True has written for a number of shows, including Nickelodeon's *Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide*, *My Life as a Teenage Robot* and *The Fairly OddParents*. For his part, the Emmy Award-winning Wiese (also *Mighty B!*'s creative director) has been a storyboard artist and writer on, among others, *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*. "We all had an idea in our heads that we wanted *The Mighty B!* to look a little more like the cartoon shows we grew up with," says Wiese. "We wanted some sense that this show is done by



the creative team the result, says Wiese, is an exciting mix of styles. "They've brought the cartoon a very unique look, keeping things painterly, spontaneous and at times experimental. Seeing the actual paint also allows for a contrast of texture with the characters, which are generally flat. That's when things really start to get visually exciting and conjure up familiar aesthetics and moods of old cartoons."

Trying to tread the fine line between hearkening back to the aesthetics of *The Flintstones*-era of Saturday morning cartoons while keeping the *Mighty B!* fresh and relevant to a contemporary audience, the animation process has proven to be a delicate one.

"I don't really like looking at exposure sheets," says Wiese. "So we work hard at getting the timing just right in the animatics. This is the chance for us to get specific animation timing across to Larry Leichliter [the show's supervising timing director]."

Being an animator himself, there are often specific scenes that Wiese needs to give extra attention to so that a scene or moment's comedy potential won't be lost. "We try to pose out some scenes that might be too abstract, so that we can be sure that the characters are doing exactly what we're looking for when it's on screen. Mostly we're trying to come up with a lot of funny drawings, funny animation, funny acting and funny timing." Wiese credits the animators at Korea-based Rough Draft for putting a lot of hard work and thought into achieving animation that conforms to the de-





#### Girl Scout's Honor:

According to Amy Poehler, Bessie Higgenbottom is an outsider who is also a leader. "She embraces imperfection, eccentricity and inner awesomeness."

sign theories of the U.S.-based design team. "This is my first time creating a series from the ground up," says Poehler. "I, as a lay person, am constantly amazed at the creativity of these animators. I knew nothing about animation."

Much attention is also lavished on the

color palette of the show. In general, *Mighty B!* tries to avoid over saturation. "I don't want it to get too 'loud'," says Wiese. "Color has a story to tell, a rhythm and story arc as much as the characters do. Colors have a secret life that is quiet and we have to try to listen for those cues and apply them to the show. Seonna [Hong] has been tremendous in

Poehler starred in the ice-skating comedy *Blades of Glory*, alongside Will Ferrell and Will Arnett, and lent her voice to the box office hit *Shrek the Third* as Snow White and to *Horton Hears A Who!* as Sally O'Malley. *Baby Mama* is her first real starring role in a film. If it's a hit, so much the better for *The Mighty B!*

Because of Poehler's on-going com-

"For me, it was important to have a *funny* show, a show with *heart*. [*The Mighty B!*] feels both fresh and classic. There's a tenderness in the art and real respect for the artists that translates."

—Amy Poehler, actress and exec producer, *The Mighty B!*



identifying those moments and pushing the story with her color choices and painting techniques."

From a promotional point of view, Nickelodeon's timing couldn't have been more fortuitous. Poehler's career hasn't hit its apogee yet. In addition to *SNL*, the actress is starring in the upcoming Universal comedy *Baby Mama* opposite Tina Fey. Last year,

mitment to *SNL*, much of her work on the series, as it moves forward, is done from New York. While Wiese and True hold down the fort at Nick's Burbank, Calif.-based studios. "For me, it was important to have a *funny* show. A show with *heart*," says Poehler. "[Sometimes in] animation the script is funny but the animation is an after thought. Or it looks beautiful but doesn't make you laugh. I had nothing to do with how *Mighty B* looks, and I am blown away by it. It looks old and new at the same time. It feels both fresh and classic. There's a tenderness in the art and a real respect for the artists that translates." ■

**The *Mighty B!* premieres on Nickelodeon Saturday, April 26, at 10:30 a.m.**







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# The Write Stuff

A veteran animation scribe takes an honest look at what it takes to make it in this competitive field today.

by Jeffrey Scott

**A**s a professional animation writer, the most common question I'm asked is, "Do you draw all the pictures?" Short answer: "Arrrggghh! No, you #@&#!...I write the words!"

There is no second most common question, just dozens of questions that, when answered from experience, spell out how to succeed as a writer in the global TV animation market. But because I don't have enough words in this article to answer dozens of questions, I'll focus on three of the most important ones, and get you some answers from three talented professionals working on some of the hottest new toons around the globe.

Chorion/Marathon's  
*Famous Five on the Case*



**Question 1: How do successful TV cartoon writers learn to write successful TV toons?**

Short answer: They study. HARD! Tim Maile, co-story editor of Chorion and Marathon Media's new animated series, *Famous Five on the Case*, studied screenwriting at UCLA film school. "My

Fresh Animation's  
*Total Drama Island*



screenwriting teacher at UCLA imparted the fine art of mercilessly cutting anything that didn't belong," explains Maile, who hammered the point home by noting that William Goldman once said dramatic writing is "killing your babies." This is an excellent lesson! Knowing what to cut is as important as knowing what to leave in.

(I cut two paragraphs here, Jeff. Keep it moving. Ed.)

Another great way to learn animation writing is to watch lots of TV. "The quickest way to blow an opportunity with my company," says Jennifer Pertsch, co-founder of Fresh Animation and creator of *Total Drama Island*, is to "mention that you don't watch much TV. We hate that. Our writers all know their craft and know the medium. They watch a LOT of TV!" And best of all, they get to write off their TV set as a tax deduction!

Of course, if you want to become a really top-notch animation writer you can go beyond studying writing and study to be a cartoon! Deborah Jarvis, a writer on Breakthrough Entertainment's new series, *Jimmy Two Shoes*, not only got her BA in English lit, she studied improv. "I had to both write and perform comedy, so I learned about the basic structure of comedy sketches by performing them," says Jarvis.

Excuse me while I paint myself yellow and run around underwater laughing like an idiot! Okay, I'm back. Seriously, I can vouch for what these writers say. I graduated from UCLA film school,

watched lots of animated cartoons growing up, and performed some live comedy on stage in Las Vegas. But what helped me the most in perfecting my craft were the Four R's: reading books on story structure and 'riting, 'riting, 'riting.

Breakthrough  
Entertainment's  
*Jimmy Two Shoes*



**Question 2: Do I need an agent to become a successful TV toon writer?**

Short answer: Maybe. Twice as long answer: Maybe not. I've worked with agents and without them, so I know it

continued on page 28



[illegible]

**TOON BOOM**

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Write Stuff

continued from page 26

can be done either way. But if you can hook yourself an agent you should definitely do it. Agents have their finger on the pulse of the industry and know who's doing what and when.

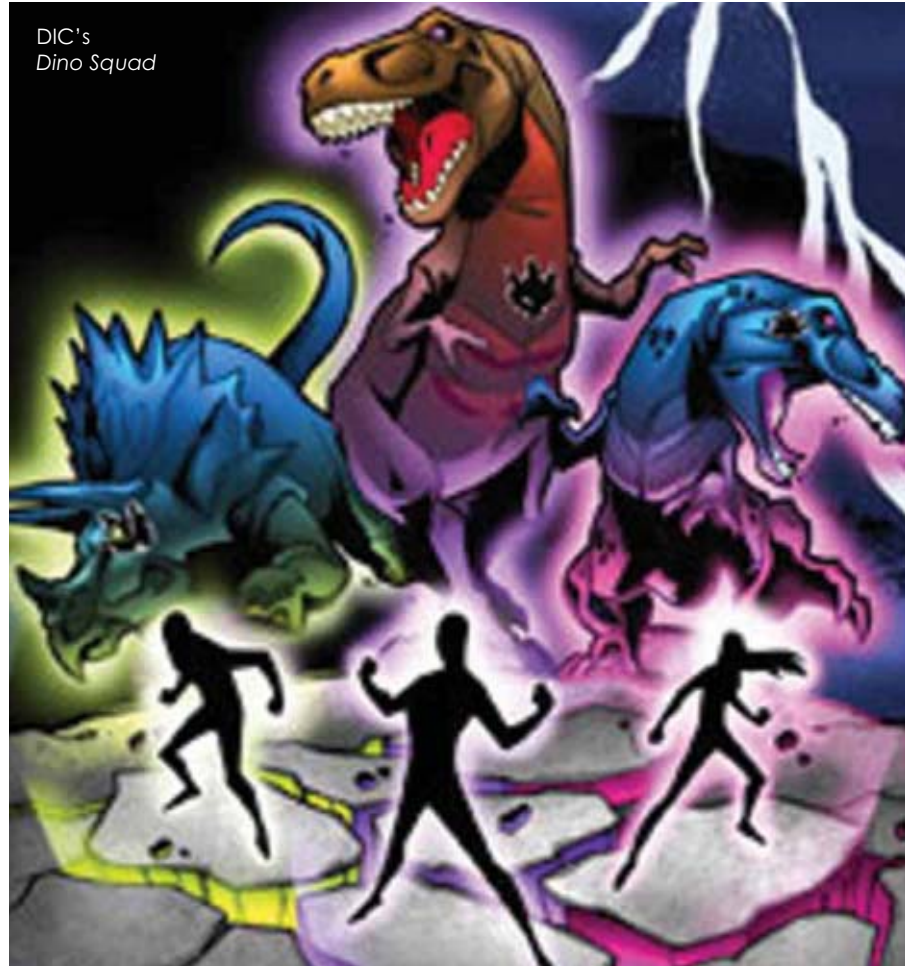
From the perspective of someone who hires writers, Pertsch says, "Fresh Entertainment finds most of its writers through agents. Agents are the best way to make the most of your opportunity and are the most important industry relationships for a writer to cultivate." From the writer's point of view, Tim Maile says, "I've observed that agents are almost indispensable in getting your first jobs. They get you in the door, and have better access to the entry-level staff positions."

True. But how do you get that agent? Painting yourself yellow and running around laughing like an idiot may get their attention (and probably get you arrested), but the best way to get representation is to write a sample script. Like a piece of bloody meat attracts sharks, a good sample script attracts agents. (Any similarities between sharks and agents, living or dead, is purely coincidental.)

I've got some valuable advice for animation writers with or without agents: Don't make the mistake of thinking your agent can do it alone. The secret of my longevity in the business has been self-promotion. Some writers think it's degrading to promote themselves. Good! That leaves more features and TV shows out there for me to write. All of my agents had dozens of clients, but I have only one. Me! Which means I can put much more attention on promoting him than they can. I constantly stay in touch with industry people around the globe, both people I know and people I don't. The more I promote, the more work I get. There's a reason the Coca-Cola Company spends a billion dollars a year on advertising: It works!

**Question 3: Okay, so I've gotten into the biz, now what do I do to become a really successful TV toon writer?**

Shamelessly self-promoting answer: Read my book! Next best answer: Ask the really successful TV toon writers,



DIC's  
Dino Squad

"The quickest way to blow an opportunity with my company is to mention that you don't watch TV. We hate that!"

—Jennifer Pertsch, co-founder of Fresh Animation (*Total Drama Island*)

which is just what I did. Jennifer Pertsch thinks the most important thing is to *know your audience*. "[Our] writers are immersed in teen trends, culture, interests, music, fashion—even their vernacular," says Pertsch. "We read teen books and magazines, watch teen movies and TV shows and tap these kids directly for their opinions and feedback on our shows. The last part especially can make the difference between a character, a scene or a show being on the mark or falling flat."

Tim Maile points out the importance of knowing the buyer: "It's important to know as much as possible about the needs/tastes of the buyer," says Maile. "It's much easier to sell a product if you know the buyer is in the market for it. You might have the tastiest,

healthiest apples in the world to sell, but it won't do you much good if you're across the counter from someone who wants to buy a loveseat." Deborah Jarvis puts it bluntly from the perspective of a working writer in the studio production trenches: "If you can't deliver a draft on time, and don't work well under a deadline, you probably won't work long in TV." But you might make a killing as a Defense Department contractor. ■

**Three-time Emmy Award winner, Jeffrey Scott, doesn't draw the pictures, but he did develop and write CBS's new *Dino Squad* series, as well as the acclaimed sourcebook on TV animation writing, *How To Write For Animation*. He can be contacted at [getjeffrey@jeffreyscott.tv](mailto:getjeffrey@jeffreyscott.tv).**

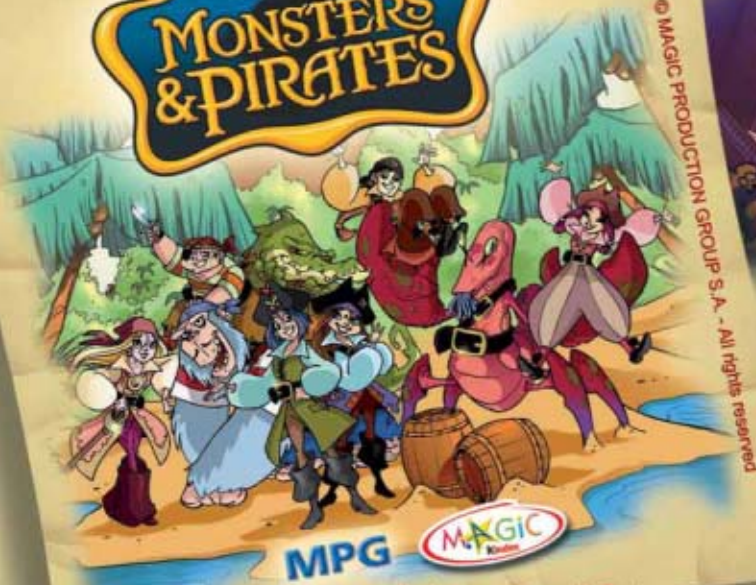


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MONDO TV FRANCE





Mixed Nutz



## A Small World After All

Vancouver-based Big Bad Boo delivers a new series which delivers a message of global understanding with sensitivity and humor. **by Ramin Zahed**

**T**hose of us who remember how hard it was to fit in the usual cliques in school should get a big kick out of a clever new animated series that focuses on that subject at MIPTV this year. Produced by the new Vancouver studio Big Bad Boo, the series is called *Mixed Nutz* and it follows the adventures of a nine-year-old boy from Iran and his tightly knit group of multi-cultural friends as they try to make sense of the American melting pot.

*Mixed Nutz* is the first series produced at Big Bad Boo and studio founders Shabnam Rezaei and her husband Aly Jetha are hoping that the toon will strike a chord with audiences who like a little bit of social understanding mixed in with their fun and games.

"We got into animation in 2004 when we produced *Babak & Friends: A First Norooz* with our partners Dustin Ellis and Mastaneh Moghadam," recalls Rezaei. "The purpose of that direct-to-DVD cartoon was to teach Iranian kids about the Persian New Year. Due to its success and demand from a wider non-Iranian audience, we realized there is a gap in the entertainment world for culturally rich stories, characters and ideas. We did a lot of research and created the new series which is about a group of misfits who become friends because they feel they just don't 'fit in.'"

Located in Vancouver's Yaletown district, Big Bad Boo employs 20 top Toon Boom animators, led by animation director Glen Kennedy (A *Pup Named Scooby-Doo*, *Tiny Toon Adventures*). "One of the main reasons we started our



studio in Vancouver was because we didn't like the look and feel of Flash and none of the studios could provide us with a close to traditional look," explains Jetha. "After a lot of research we decided Toon Boom could provide us with the look we wanted. We hired animation veteran Glen Kennedy and the best Toon Boom talent in Vancouver to animate the show. Our co-director [Emmy Award-winning] Alfred Gimeno was very keen on having a traditional look, which we all agreed with, and Toon Boom has a real environment where you can almost replicate the look. We are very happy with the animation quality."

The studio's other new property, *Going Bananas*, also has the same look and stylistic touches. Centering on three crazy monkeys that get into all kinds of trouble, the show has no dialogue and is perfect for international audiences.

### The Road Ahead

Jetha points out that any new independent animation studio faces two major challenges today—financing and getting distribution.

"We have worked relentlessly to get financing together for the show, over-seeing other business ventures to make this happen," he says. "We have both been serial entrepreneurs in a range of industries like financial software, semi-conductors and telecommunications. We both have such a passion for animation that the personal sacrifices have been well worth it. As for distribution, we want to take advantage of a multi-platform strategy where we use the Internet, mobile and traditional distribution channels to get our show out there."



Aly Jetha



Shabnam Rezaei

Jetha says the cartoon is also being dubbed into five other languages. He adds, "We are after international distribution right from the start. We have talked to some of the big stations in Korea, India, Iran, Afghanistan and a few other Asian countries."

Rezaei says *Mixed Nutz* sends a clear message to its young audience: "Be proud of who you are and be kind to others." She adds, "While this message is an old one that reminds me of the Zoroastrian mantra (Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds), it is one that is more important than ever. With all the problems in the world, we want kids to know that we are all the same at the end. We all have mothers and fathers, aspirations and dreams. And if we can just be kind to each other that will be a great start for a better tomorrow."

High on the list of the studio founders' goals is creating a positive, creative environment for the animators. "Aly and I got into his business because we love it so much, so that has to remain a constant or growing factor in our future plans," says Rezaei. "The state of the industry seems to be such that unfortunately most artists are not treated well and we hope to change that. We want Big Bad Boo Studios to be the top place for artists and animation in Canada, a place where people are proud to be and look forward to coming to work every day. If we can achieve that, then we have done amazingly well. Success will follow." ■

For more info about this dynamic new studio, visit [www.bigbadboo.ca](http://www.bigbadboo.ca).



# BOOWA & KWALA



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# 12 MIP Toons to Keep an Eye On!

As TV producers, buyers and distributors make their way to the annual MIPTV market in Cannes this month (April 7-11), we thought it would be a good idea to highlight some of the new animated series making their debut at the event: Here is the skinny on a dozen that captured our attention. *by Mercedes Milligan & Ramin Zahed*

## Pretty in Pig

Our readers will be tickled pink to know that **Granada International** is finally ready to take Cannes by storm with the long-awaited launch of their curly-tailed porkers—err—stars, Pinky and Perky of ***The Pinky & Perky Show***. Brought to life by Pinky and Perky Enterprises, Method Films and DQ Entertainment Ltd. in a co-production for CBBC and France 3, these twin piggy brothers are ready to hoof it into the hearts of viewers.

The titular heroes begin their adventures when they get their big break—their very own “live” TV show! The brothers have a lot of fun putting together episodes packed with crazy stunts, wild games, anarchic cartoons-within-a-cartoon and celebrity guests. The show’s messy and chaotic entertainment is a huge hit with their viewers, but not so much with grown-ups who run the station. These angst-ridden adults are determined to get rid of the piglets, and are constantly coming up with wicked plots and underhanded schemes ... and it’s up to Pink and Perky to save the day AND get on with the show.

A sleek high-definition CGI take on the 1950s U.K. puppet animation show of the same name, *Pinky & Perky* boasts high production values, award-winning writers and plenty of style and innovation to carry this classic comedy duo in this millennium. As Granada aptly puts it: “It’s the next pig thing!”



## Carving a Niche



MIPTV attendees will have the pleasure of being introduced to market first-timers **Littleloud Animation**, who are bringing two exciting new cross-platform properties to Cannes. The U.K.-based “niche production house” uses their unique style and multi-platform savvy to create engaging series without barriers, as well as exciting web content to support broadcast (see the recently completed interactive web game *Bow Street Runner* commissioned by Channel 4 for their series *City of Vices*).

Taking center stage will be Littleloud’s new entertainment property, **Idertainment**—a collection of animated comedy series assembled as a pre-packed “mini show” available for TV, web and mobile broadcast. David Jacklin, Littleloud’s chief producer, says, “[Idertainment] is fast-

paced entertainment; it’s topical, it’s weekly ... and the content can be accessed any time, anywhere from the audience’s preferred medium.”

Shows currently in production for Idertainment include ***Tourists from Mars***, a current affairs show for the seven to 11 set presented as an alien newscast about human activities (recently commissioned by CBBC); ***The A List***, for an older 16-30 aud that satirizes celeb tabloid fodder with a “former It Girl” hostess; and in development is ***Hip Joint***, a rock/pop music review show hosted by Siamese twins Hari and Kari—separated only by their very different musical tastes. With some impressive 3D animation, fresh concepts and a client roster full of bigwigs like BBC, Channel 4, Paramount, Sony and Universal, Littleloud is sure to make some big noise in the Palais.



## An Early Holiday Treat

As Raquel Benítez, CEO of Canada-based **Comet Entertainment, Inc.**, says, "We are avoiding the 'just another Christmas special' tag on this film. It stands up on its own." A point we'll take to heart when considering the newest offering from the Toronto production and distribution outfit: the ready-for-prime-time, feature-length holiday gem ***Santa versus Claus***.

In this slightly twisted yuletide tale, Santa has been bitten by the fame bug and wants nothing more than to live the reckless and fun-filled celebrity lifestyle he deserves after so many years of hard work. This dramatic change from his philanthropic personality causes his conscience and Christmas Spirit to leave him and take on a personality of its own: Claus. Adding to the Christmas chaos is the nefarious Vladimir Dragonoff, the owner of sinister corporation VLADEX which has been chosen by the aloof Santa to take over the distribution of presents on Christmas Eve. Of course, with a name like Vladimir Dragonoff you know this conniving CEO (Chief Evilness Officer?) is plotting something much more diabolical—like ruining Christmas for everyone.

A co-production between Spain's Fanciful Animation Arts and Comet, with most global rights already sold to Germany's Telepool, *Santa versus Claus* is ready to tackle some Humbugs. "The show calls for a high-quality traditional animation style with lots of humor," says Benítez, "and the response from children has been amazing!"



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## Trials and Triumphs of Parenthood

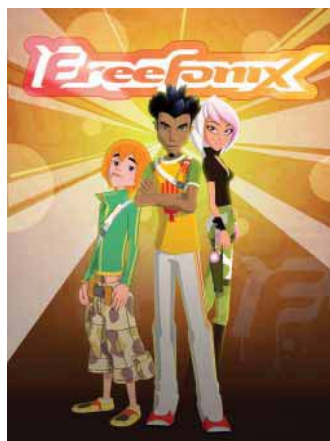
In a time when Japan is facing a near critically low birth rate, **Toei Animation** is hoping to use the power of animation to shake up any negative notions about child-rearing. A quirky and cute Flash-animated family comedy, ***Three Little Daughters***—directed by Iku Ishiguro (*Demashita! Powerpuff Girls Z*) with character designs by Satoru Iriyoshi (*Chibi Maruko-chan*)—showcases both the joys and minor headaches that come with being the mother of three young girls in a comical, endearing way.

The series is being adapted from the long-running and very popular comic blog-turned-book series *Uchi no San Shimai*, written by Pretz Matsumoto, whose manga work has also been published in shoujo mag *Margaret*. The blog, whose name translates literally as "The Three Sisters in My Family," was launched in 2005 and since then has generated over 75 million visits with more than 140,000 hits a day. Matsumoto's sweetly snarky tableaux and kids-say-the-darndest-things comedy quickly won over Internet audiences from fellow mothers to unwed career women, teen girls and even school-aged children. The daughters in question—named after their distinct personalities—are Airhead, the eldest who despite her responsibility and caution seems to have a screw loose; Libero, the middle child who marches to the beat of her own very independent drum; and President, the fussy baby of the bunch who always gets her way. Hopefully their cute kid antics will make it stateside soon!



## When Music Saves the Day

We all know that music has charms to soothe the savage beast, but U.K.-based toon house **Cinnamon Entertainment** also believes that it can do a lot for global understanding. In the new CG-animated 40 x 30 series ***Freefonix***, three mismatched heroes use the power of music to save the world in a futuristic city named Los Bosmos. Cinnamon's spokesman Ben Titchmarsh tells us the show was written and produced by **Magnus Fiennes** (brother of Joseph and Ralph), a renowned cross-genre composer, producer and mixer. Working with a budget of \$20 million, *Freefonix* is a truly multi-national project. "The series involves production work all over the world," says Titchmarsh.



"The scripts were written in Los Angeles and New York, its voices were recorded in Galway in Ireland and the animation was modelled in Cinnamon's own studio in the Isle of Man and in Paris before being sent to Toonz Animation in India. Then back to Paris and Ireland for final post-production work." Oh, and did we mention that both musical and athletic stars are expected to do voice work for the show? Hmmm, we have a funny feeling this is going to be a great fit for Mr. and Mrs. Beckham.

MAY•08

33



## Serving E.T. with a Twist

A lot of young boys dream about having a secret buddy from outer space. Now if the same friend can transform itself into a bad-guy-fighting red giant, then you may have a blueprint for a hit animated series on your hands. The 52 x 13 CG-animated series **My Giant Friend**, co-produced by French studio **Timoon Animation** and Korea's **SAMG**, is essentially about the friendship between a young boy named Linus and his big giant red extra-terrestrial buddy called Boom and their battle against a huge corporation called the Space Development Center. There's a lot of buzz surrounding this new property, which reportedly has an \$8.5 million budget and is bound to make a big splash at the market this year. We have a feeling the show's creators Suhoon Kim and Aurelie Aime are on to something!



## Int'l Collaboration Nets Toon Sensation

What do you get when you take a U.S. production heavy-weight, throw in a concept from Asia's largest online multi-player games publisher, throw in a dash of international cartoon know-how and top it all off with input from AniMag's former publisher, Rita Street? If you guessed "One heck of a show," you'd be right!

Calif.-based **Mike Young Productions** is bringing a little action to the market with their new Flash series **Hero:108**. This comedy-adventure package of 52 x 11 hopes to rope in the finicky eyeballs of their kids six to 11 target with the help of some graphically impactful, Asian-influenced designs brought to the table by concept developer **Gamania Digital** in Taiwan. **Cartoon Network International** is lending their co-pro prowess, while Radar Cartoons founder and former AniMagger Street exec produces. *Hero:108* follows the adventures of a group of kung fu kiddies determined to end a conflict between animals and humans in The Hidden Kingdom. The young heroes fighting as the First Squadron are courageous Lin Chung, Mighty Ray, Mystique Sonia and the intriguingly named Jumpy Ghostface. Together they battle all kinds of beasties like fire-breathing ligers and stinky spitting camels.

The show's game-y graphics mean that *Hero* has been developed with an eye toward online gaming and multi-platform expansion, so these little heroes may be battling evil on any number of screens very soon.

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## More Monkey Business

That little monkey Bruno has been good to Toronto-based **Cuppa Coffee** ever since the animated character debuted in a series of one-minute interstitials. Now after starring in two seasons of a longer format *Bruno and the Banana Bunch*, he will be featured in a brand new series titled **Let's Go Bruno!**, which

combines 2D animation with live action in a game show format. "We found there to be a lack of originality in pre-K TV that tends not to ever break away from the one trick pony concept," says Cuppa Coffee president Adam Shaheen. "The Bruno brand breaks that mold by consistently debuting in a wholly new and refreshing way," says Shaheen. "I'm not sure anyone really wants 200 episodes of the same old thing—particularly a four-year old!" You'd be surprised, Adam!



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MIP Toons

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## Happy, Shiny Balloontoons

Parents looking for a show that teaches their kids about dealing with the problems of everyday life will be happy to know about **Balloontoons**, a new toon distributed by Germany's **Studio100 Media**. Created by Anatoly Prokharov, Shaykhinurov Salavat, Igor Shevchuk and Anna Malginova, the 52 x 13 series was created as part of the cultural/educational project "World Without Violence," produced with the help of Russia's Ministry of Culture at CG house Studio Petersburg.

Patrick Elmendoff, Studio100 Media's general manager, tells us that the show had 5 million viewers when it aired on major TV channels in Russia. "In creating the characters, special attention was given to choosing forms and colors highlighting their different personalities, so that children would find it easier to draw their favorite Balloontoon,"

he adds. "Kids will also learn how to react in difficult situations and all of this happens within the framework of living together in a harmonious world without violence." And that's something we can all get behind.



## Monster to Invade America

It looks like **Marathon Media's** demon-fighting quartet known as **Monster Buster Club** has found a nice spot on Toon Disney cabler in the U.S. This is the French studio's fourth toon bowing on American TV (following *Totally Spies*, *Team Galaxy* and *Martin Mystery*). The CG-animated comedy-action series has an estimated budget of \$21 million and centers on a top-secret club formed by four 10-year-old kids who are fighting an alien invasion facing their hometown. MBC is a co-production with TF1, Jetix Europe and Canada's YTV. 2008 is shaping up to be a busy year for Marathon. The studio plans to launch a full-length feature version of ***Totally Spies*** later this year.



## Natural Wonder

If you had to choose one global trend that sums up consumerism for early '08, it'd have to be "Good things come in GREEN packages!" Brand new from European distribution giant **Mediatoon** (who recently swung some hot new deals on *The Magic Roundabout*) comes **INAMI**, a 2D-animated production with an ecological spin.

The series, a package of 26 half-hours, is a co-production of Ellipsanime and Seahorse Productions which targets kids six to 10 with its sumptuous art and coming-of-age storyline. *INAMI* takes place in a beautiful, fictitious land called Amazonia full of deep, emerald forests, exotic wildlife and, unfortunately, pressing and all-too-familiar environmental issues. The titular character is a young boy who lives with a Shamanistic tribe called the Ballacaïbos.

The tribe lives a technology-free existence (one wonders how kids of today will react to a character WITHOUT a truckload of super computers and hyper advanced cell phones?) deep in the forest and completely in tune with the marvels of nature. Though young, Inami is impatient to grow up and become a man. However, in order to do that he'll have to listen and learn from the tribal elders, as well as the rhythms and mysteries of the rainforest itself. About the show (already sold to TF1 [France] and RTBF [Belgium]), Mediatoon's deputy general manager Marie-Pierre Moulinjeune says, "We are delighted to present a European production which explores some environmental issues in a fun and attractive way." A beautiful, topical property for this year's market.

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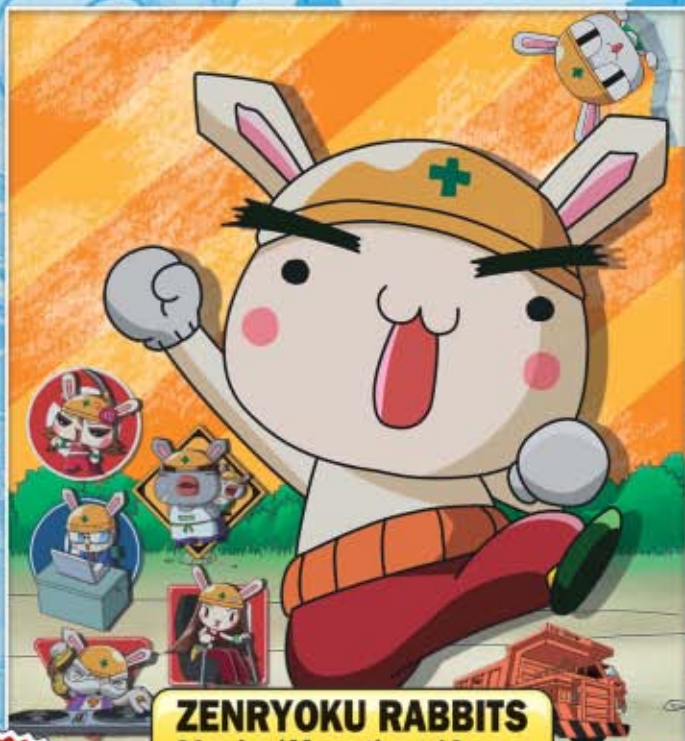


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MIP Toons

continued from page 36

## Panda in the Real World

We all know about DreamWorks Animation's kung-fu-loving panda, but there's another cool bear making news in the toon world at the MIPTV market this year. Created by Sydney's hot toon and design studio **Sixty40**, *The Eduganda Panda Show* has a brilliant premise: It follows the daily adventures of an animated bear who leaves his animated studio and enters the real world—i.e. the live-action universe. The 13 x 11 series combines live-action footage, 2D and CG animation and has the same offbeat sensibility of *South Park* and [adult swim] shows. As company co-founders Matt Taylor and Mark Simpson explain to us, "At Sixty40, we love things that are a bit wrong and that push the boundaries of what's funny, and *Panda* does that regularly! We also have a deep admiration for fallen celebrities struggling to be just who they want to be, in a world that judges and condemns all too easily! Towers of strength like Danny Bonaduce have shown us how you can romp through the daisies of politically correct society in army boots!" See, now that's funny.



## They're Big, and You Can Take 'em Apart

They're as big as dinosaurs and twice as powerful! No, we're not talking about the Tegos of some animation artists. That's just how the folks at **DECODE Enterprises** are describing their newest cartoon stars, *Animal Mechanicals*. The new 40 x 11 series is set in a "snap-together-take-apart" world which can also transform just like the giant heroes. As Decode's president Neil Court sees it, "This series is a fantastic addition to our slate of standout preschool entertainment. We have had a great response from the international market to Halifax's other kids shows and this unique series promises to be no exception." Neil, you had us when you told us the show has characters with names like Rex, Unicorn, Komodo, Sasquatch and Mouse!



## Drawn to Reality

Liz Scully, the creator/producer of **Bardel Entertainment/Leaping Lizard/Avril Stark Entertainment's** new animated series *Zeke's Pad* says she couldn't help but think how great it would be if what she drew actually came to life. "Then I thought, imagine what would happened if I put that kind of creative power in the hands of an impulsive teenage boy. Presto! *Zeke's Pad* was born!"

The 26 x 22 series follows the adventures of the forementioned teen hero as he experiments with his "totally wired" drawing pad! Producer Delna Bhesania says Zeke isn't simply reacting to the world around him. "It's his actions and what he draws on his pad that is the catalyst for each storyline ... the possibilities are endless!" It all kind of makes us wish we had our version of this super-cool drawing pad—which is exactly what happened when our animator friends were showing off their latest Wacom tablets to us. ■





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New alien,  
Echo Echo.

# Ben 10 Hits the Reset Button

Cartoon Network's young hero gets a design facelift, a whole new set of alien alter egos and a darker sci-fi vibe.

by Ramin Zahed

**F**ans of Ben Tennyson, the kid with the powerful Omnitrix watch who could transform into 10 different alien heroes, should get ready for some major surprises this month. When *Ben 10: Alien Force* premieres on Cartoon Network in April, our adventurous hero will be five years older—he's 15 now—looks quite different, and his world will be edgier and more adult, says new series exec producer Glen Murakami.

"In the beginning of the new series, he doesn't have the watch and has a normal life, and is pretty happy about being a regular kid," says the Emmy and Annie award-winning producer, who has overseen many of Warner Bros. Animation's biggest hits of the past decade, including *The New Batman Adventures*, *Batman Beyond*, *The Batman*, *Justice League* and *Teen Titans*. "However, Grandpa Max is missing and he goes to get advice from his cousin Gwen to figure out what has happened to him, and that's how the story begins to unfold."

The new chapter in Ben's life involves 10 spanking-new alien life forms generated from his Omnitrix as well as a new menacing race of intergalactic enemies known as DNAliens. His old nemesis Kevin 11 is also back to make life difficult for him after escaping the extra-dimensional prison, the Null Void. It sounds like a whole lot of thrills and chills are in store for the gang this

spring.

As Murakami tells us, the brass at Cartoon Network were looking to revamp the series, which first premiered in 2005 and ran for four seasons and spawned a highly rated live-action movie which starred Lee Majors as Grandpa Max. Murakami says they approached him to work with supervising producer and story editor Dwayne McDuffie (*Justice League*) on the version 2.0 of the show, which was originally created by Man of Action (comic-book artists Joe Casey, Joe Kelly, Duncan Rouleau and Steve Seagle). "I had wanted to work again with Dwayne, and our goal was to move it far from the original series, so we had more creative freedom. There was clearly enough distance to move the show into new territories without losing the original premise or appeal of the original series."

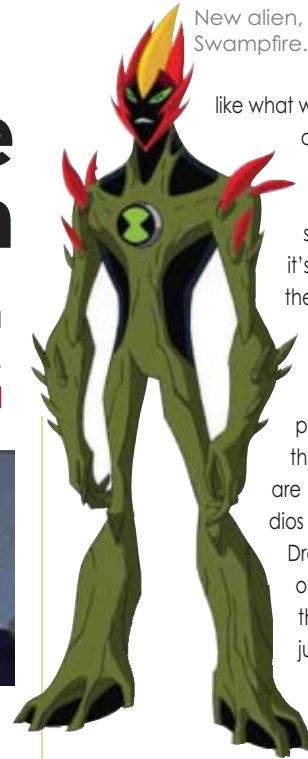
Obviously, the brilliant Mr. Murakami was the perfect man for this re-invention as he had been heavily involved with the previous incarnations of *Batman* and *Superman* at Warner Bros. Animation. "We did it on the original *Batman* and recreated *The Batman* and did the same thing for *Superman* and *Batman Beyond*. You try to do

something new and keep it fresh without alienating the original fans. I think one way to look at *Alien Force* is 'Scooby-Doo meets *The X-Files*!' It's more of a science-fiction show and less of a superhero show."

He also points out that although the idea of a kid who can become 10 different alien superheroes is a great wish fulfillment notion for the young viewers, it's also quite a tall order to deliver in animated form. "I'm just happy that it looks



Glen Murakami



New alien,  
Swampfire.

like what we actually set out to do. It's hard to explain all the details to overseas teams sometimes, because it's so abstract. It has the potential to be a jumbled mess, but thankfully, it's not!"

Helping the 30-plus team working on the show in Burbank are Korean service studios Sun Min and Rough Draft, which do much of the heavy lifting for the production. "It's just too much work to do it all in-house these days," Murakami points out. "Those studios have come up with such a great shorthand and are able to handle that volume of work. I don't think we could assemble a team big enough to handle that job in the U.S. in such a short time. It's been so long since a U.S. studio did all the work on an action-adventure weekly series. The overseas studios really excel at it."

Overall, Murakami says his team sticks with a more traditional 2D approach to animation. "The 3D stuff hasn't come to the point where we can use it completely for TV. People are still trying to figure out a blend. Personally, I like the CG animation that looks like 2D. I would say we try to do things a bit more like Miyazaki than anyone else. He has a way of deconstructing a movie and animating it."

He also believes that now that they've pushed the reset button on Ben and his alien watch, the viewers will go back and rediscover the original series. "I'm very lucky to work on shows that have been so influential," he concludes. "Digital animation has sped up the process and people expect things to happen faster. Things have changed a lot in the past 10 years. TV animation has a lot of competition from online projects and video games. But you can't compare TV animation with video games and live action. It's apples and oranges. People still love animation and you have to remember that you can still do certain things only in animation." ■

Ben 10: Alien Force premieres on Cartoon Network on Friday, April 18 at 8 p.m. with a one-hour special. The series will then move to its regular time slot Saturdays at 10 a.m.



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# Inspector Gadget's Back on Duty Again!

by Michael Mallory

These days it is rare that a cartoon character makes it to the quarter-century mark. It is even rarer to have spent that entire time consistently in the public eye somewhere in the world. Most unusual of all is puffing out those 25 candles on the cake and then going right back to work in a brand new series.

Inspector Gadget—the bumbling, trench-coated, cyborg detective who possesses a built-in appliance store not only at his fingertips, but often in place of them—has already spawned a half-dozen spin-off series (including the juvenile incarnation *Gadget Boy* and a show with the robotic "Gadgetinis"), two live-action films and a CG-animated feature. But DIC Entertainment's iconic copper is now returning in his original traditionally animated form (albeit against 3D backgrounds) for *Inspector Gadget*, a new series which is targeted for global distribution in spring 2009.

DIC Chairman and CEO Andy Heyward, who co-created the franchise along with producer Jean Chalopin and director Bruno Bianchi back in 1982, says that the new show will have many of the same characters that Gadget fans have come to know—such as Gadget's young but adept niece Penny, her dog Brain, Gadget's supervisor Chief Quimby and the nefarious Dr. Claw, leader of M.A.D.—and will still feature the character's signature klutz comedy. But he adds it will also have a darker edge.

While the original show had a look that bore traces of "Japanimation," reflecting the Japanese studios that animated it, the new series will boast a design style that leans more closely toward anime. "We're going to be making the direction more cinematic in terms of camera angle usage, and have more dramatic musical cues," Heyward says. "It was originally done more squash-and-stretch and was much goofier. Now we're going to be making the stories a little edgier."

As befits the new show's new mood, the characters' designs are undergoing a revision to cast them a bit closer to the angular comic-book style, and a new cast of villains will be created in the same mode. "We're going to have much more legitimate jeopardy and higher stakes," Heyward says. The series is angling for some celebrity guest voices as well.

Inspector Gadget's longevity in one of the entertainment world's most competitive marketplaces can be attributed to several basic factors, according to Heyward. Chief among them is that audiences of all ages tend to love—maybe even outright identify with—bumbling superheroes who succeed in spite of themselves. "That worked with Inspector Clouseau, and it worked with *Get Smart*," Heyward says. "There is a little bit of *The Six Million Dollar Man* [in Gadget], and that was a nice cocktail."

He also pinpoints the show's *misterioso* pop theme song (a favorite in the YouTube Hit Parade) as a contributing factor in the franchise's popularity.

What also worked for both *Get Smart* and *Inspector Gadget* was the distinctive voice of comic actor Don Adams, who played Gadget throughout most of the character's career. Adams, sadly, died in 2005.

While Heyward says that no official decision has yet been made regarding Adam's replacement in the role, veteran voice specialist Maurice LaMarche has already played the character in the 2005 direct-to-video feature *Inspector Gadget's Biggest Capers Ever*. "Sometimes when Don was doing the voices, Maurice would be there [LaMarche voiced Chief Quimby in the earlier series] and Don would say, 'Maurice, you do this one ... you do me better than me!'" Heyward notes.

The Burbank-based DIC will co-produce *Inspector Gadget* with a to-be-announced (as of press time the deal isn't yet inked) European production partner and the show will premiere in foreign markets the same time as its U.S. debut. Two writing teams and several animation studios around the world will be working to ready the 52 half-hour episodes by the planned spring launch. On top of that, Heyward is busy lining up the licensing program, which will include master toy, apparel, video game and fast food licenses.



Andy Heyward



Gadget and the Gadgetinis (2001)



Inspector Gadget (VG) (1990)



Gadget's new look.



On that score, Heyward proudly points out yet another feather in Inspector Gadget's porkpie: "You know, Inspector Gadget was one of the top 10 most successful Happy Meal promos of all time."

Really? To borrow a phrase: Wowzers! ■

**In honor of Gadget's 25th Anniversary, Fox is releasing two episodes of the original series on DVD. Look for *Inspector Gadget: Big Little Problems* in stores June 17. For more info about the famous inspector, visit [www.dicentertainment.com](http://www.dicentertainment.com).**



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# Going for the Green

The Irish animation scene is going through a mini-renaissance thanks to government support and the quality of the creative work done by several studios.

by Thomas J. McLean

**L**ike so many nations where animation is trying to develop as an industry, Ireland is at a crossroads.

Growth has been fueled in recent years by a generous tax investment that is worth up to 20 percent of the budget of an Irish production. That's lead to a solid stream of work for both domestic and international television series, and helped the Irish animation industry establish a foothold in feature film work.

But as with most nations that get to this point, there's no clear path for getting to the next level of creating a dependably self-sustaining industry capable of creating intellectual properties that can succeed on the global stage.

Execs at various animation studios each have their own ideas on the current state of animation in Ireland, what it needs to maintain its current levels and how it will achieve the next level of success.

"The real strength within the Irish sector is the creation of distinctive properties that ultimately attracts the larger international broadcasters, which eventually leads to a collaboration on all fronts: development, financial, creative, distribution, interactive and merchandising," says Gary Timpson, managing director of Dublin-based Kavaleer Productions.

The health of the animation business has improved significantly, with the industry's ability to meet creative challenges as important a factor as government support, says Paul Young, a partner at Cartoon Saloon in Kilkenny. The company has completed work on its first TV series, *Skunk Fu!* and is in the final stages of its first feature film, *The Secret of Kells* (formerly known as *Brendan and the Book of Kells*) for Buena Vista Ireland. (The beautifully animated

2D project received an enthusiastic response when it was presented at a Cartoon Movie presentation in Germany last month.)

"[It's] much better than it was five years ago, with a number of studios creating their own IP and servicing on major series for international companies," he says. "It's helping to keep the talent here, where before all our best artists had to emigrate to work."

Timpson at Kavaleer, which is working on series *Lifeboat Luke*, *Garth and Dad the Impaler* with TV-Loonland, agrees. "The biggest factor is the quality of the content [and] ideas that [are] coming out of the Irish studios and the individual directors' drive to secure international interest and investment is unyielding," he says.

Local support and co-productions have helped, but support from broadcasters has been lagging and the international TV market offers more potential, says Ralph Christians, CEO and executive producer at Magma Films in Galway. "[What is] needed are stories with global potential which appeal to an international market instead of stories written to comply with regulations by local funding organizations."

Magma is due to finish work in July on the animated feature *Niko & the Way to the Stars*, which has pre-sold to The Weinstein Co. It's also produced the animated feature and TV series *The Ugly Duckling and Me*. Christians says Magma, which has been in business for 24 years now, is looking to expand in the U.S. market with animated feature films and into video-on-demand platforms in Europe.

"The reputation that Ireland has carved out as a country to partner with is extremely positive both from a financial standpoint and as a resource for experienced and highly creative staff," says Timpson.

Founded in 1994 by Cathal Gaffney and Darragh O'Connell, Brown Bag Films employs more than 50 people and has opened an office in Toronto to take advantage of a co-production treaty between Ireland and Canada.

Kavaleer, on the other hand, is exploring getting into the games space, Timpson says.

Young says the way the country's tax investments are set up, with the government paying at the start of production, Irish companies are good co-production partners. "We focus on pre-production and production management for broadcasters and producers in the U.S.; depending on the size of the show we can also do animation," he says. "But we are not a massive studio, so we focus on one or two shows at a time so we always have an 'A' team on the work. We can't compete with the larger, quantity-focused studios in the Far East, but we can compete on attention and quality for the right project."

As in most markets, finding qualified animators with the right set of technical skills is always a challenge.

"We are struggling to get animation talent locally, and have a real mix of staff from various countries around the world," says Gaffney. "Staff need to have the proper work visa before we will employ them, so that typically means we get most of our staff from Europe."

Gaffney says the Dublin-based Brown Bag, which is producing the series *Olivia* for Nick Jr. and Chorion and recently worked on *Wobblyland* for HIT and Nick Jr. U.K., is constantly in need of specialists, such as riggers and technical directors.

The future should continue to bring changes to the Irish industry.

Young says technology will bring the most radical challenges, and he thinks Irish animation is ready for the challenge. "The dramatic change in how audiences view content now outside of the television area on Internet and VOD will be where we will need to direct our attention," he says. "Thankfully, the Irish industry is very much aware of this, and there are a number of digital platform companies on the rise that we can work with to stake our own claim in that world."





"With the injection of more and more online material, I believe that available funds for producers from broadcasters will decrease due to the diminishing revenue from advertising," says Timpson. "Irish companies will eventually lean toward the smaller formats or increased partnerships to close the financial gap."

Timpson also thinks it may be time to revise the tax incentive plan to reflect the need for a wider and more long-term view of the market. "There is a

need for the Irish government to implement a five- to 10-year plan," he says. "[It needs] a fairer balance in terms of tax benefits and investment between the live-action sector and the ever-growing animation quarter, as well as grants for specific training."

"We can't predict how the Irish animation industry will change because it is too dependent on local resources and single funding decisions," Christians says. "Our company looks beyond national borders to grow and expand into new markets." ■

**Thomas McLean is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in animation, comic books and visual effects. He writes the comic-book blog Bags and Boards ([weblogs.variety.com/blogs\\_and\\_boards](http://weblogs.variety.com/blogs_and_boards)).**

A partial list of some of the country's thriving animation companies:

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**Magma Films**

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# The Padded Cel

by Robby London



## When Recession Hits Toon Town

**R**ecession? What recession? We don't know about you, but we breathe a huge sigh of relief each time President Bush assures us that there is no recession and the U.S. economy remains strong. Phew! After all, hasn't he demonstrated time and again that his word is as solid as the U.S. dollar? (Euros? What Euros? When asked about the value of the Euro, Bush conceded that they get good gas mileage but said he'd never be caught dead driving one.)

And yet, despite the continual Presidential reassurances, the public does not seem to have gotten the memo. In fact, some of our most beloved animated friends find themselves in dire financial straits. No recession? Tell *them* it ain't so! Here's a roundup of the toon world's most tragic recession-ary tales of recent months:

**SpongeBob:** With his home caught up in the sub-brine mortgage mess, and facing sporeclosure, poor Bob has been wringing his torso and working his square pants off by moonlighting—as a mop in public restrooms. As if this weren't indignity enough, he's actually been stepped on several times by Senator Larry Craig's "wide stance."

**Tom & Jerry:** Victimized by mortgage default and subsequent eviction, the sworn enemies have had to forge an uneasy truce and move into a shared cardboard box on Skid Row. With no budget for cheese, Jerry works the streets with a sign reading "Will be squashed-and-stretched for crumbs," while Tom has taken up Scientology in the belief that it will make him a rich and famous movie star. And Jerry

thought he was harassed before!

**Dora the Explorer:** Nick's spunky preschooler has had her exploring allowance so severely reduced that all she can afford is to sit around watching the Discovery Channel and eating Pop Tarts. And since her family can no longer afford cable, her piggy-bank fund must now be earmarked for a digital converter box—without which even her TV will cease to function in February 2009. Swiper's new assignment is to shoplift dinner every night. "Swiper, no

keeps telling him that if that's his goal, he should get a job as a Congressional aid.

**Mr. Magoo:** After finally saving up enough for Lasik surgery, the recent hit to his stock portfolio left him with only enough money to do one eye. The good news is that he doesn't run into as many things. The bad news is that he can only stand in place and walk in a circle. The worse news is ... Larry Craig keeps thinking Magoo is winking at him.

**Shrek:** Everyone thinks he's made of green, but let's face it—trying to travel to the Kingdom of Far Far Away for the latest sequel (working title: *Shrek Too Many*) is not easy without funds. He tried to use frequent flyer miles but the only date that wasn't blacked out by the airlines was February 29, 2012. Things are so bad, Donkey is applying for "Shetland pony" gigs at children's birthday parties and the former princess, Mrs. Shrek, is augmenting household income by holding "shtupperware parties." (And you thought "the big O" stood for "big ogre?"")

Face it, it's not a pretty picture out there. Let's hope

these are just isolated instances. Please, everyone, don't panic! Don't fall prey to the self-fulfilling psychology of recession! Just remember that President Bush remains "bullish" on the U.S. economy. And don't even THINK about the implied anagram in the word "bullish." ■

**Robby London is a veteran animation industry executive who denies having any connection whatsoever with former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer's recession-fighting activities.**



Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

swiping ... transfats!" Now YOU say it at home, all together: "¿Recesión? Qué recesión?"

**Inspector Gadget:** The muni bond crisis in Metro City has resulted in Gadget's layoff. To feed Penny (who changed her name to Pence and instantly doubled her net worth), Gadget has been forced to accept a job in a Laundromat—as a washing machine. Even sadder, he believes he will catch money launderers this way. Penny, er, Pence,



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# When Toons Spring in Salerno

Italy's 12th Cartoons on the Bay festival promises to be another sweet rendez-vous with the best TV animation the world has to offer. **by Ramin Zahed**



Alfio Bastiancich

No one can deny the long list of reasons that draws travellers to Italy in springtime. However, animation lovers know that the annual Cartoons on the Bay festival (held this year April 10-13 in Salerno) is another one of the country's many charms. The 12th Edition of the event promises to offer four days of special screenings of animated TV series, shorts and world premieres of feature-length projects.

It's certainly not business as usual when it comes to this year's slate of toons says festival director Alfio Bastiancich. "It's well known that Cartoons on the Bay is mainly dedicated to TV series. Nevertheless, recently we have also been awarding Pulcinella Awards to animation shorts suitable for television broadcasting," he says. "This year, to our surprise, we ran into a very interesting group of elegant, ironic and amusing shorts unquestionably suitable for the TV market. Not only young beginners or students that have recently graduated from cinema schools but also series producers or large institutions like the National Film Board of Canada submitted their films."

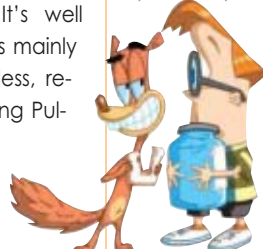
The short film category will honor projects such as David Normal's *The Bicycle Ride*, Matthew Walker's *John and Karen*, Daniel Nocke's *No Room for Gerold*, and Claude Cloutier's *Sleeping Betty*, which has already had an award-filled run on the festival circuit.

The festival's Pulcinella Awards will also be awarded in categories such as TV Series for Children—where diverse titles such as *Frankenstein's Cat*, *Hairy Scary*, *Tak* and *the Power of Juju*, *Steffi's World* and *Wayside* will be competing—and TV series for All Ages, where shows such as *Fred's Head*, *Mustang Mama* and *Water & Bubbles* are up against more well-known U.S. titles such

as *Rick & Steve: The Happiest Gay Couple in All the World* (Logo TV) and *Squirrel Boy* (Cartoon Network).

Since Bastiancich gets to see a lot of projects from all over the world, we asked him whether he noticed any special trends or themes in the global toon zeitgeist. "The most interesting trend we can point out is the growing independence of Eastern productions from Western ones,

Squirrel Boy



Water & Bubbles



Sleeping Betty



Rick & Steve



especially in content and style," he notes. "We'd seen this before in Japan, but the trend has now extended to South Korea, India and China as well. Productions from these countries are now intended for both local and international markets. The so-called Eastern developing countries are now not only realizing series

and feature films conceived in Western countries, but also producing them, often in co-production with European studios. As a result, a melting pot of styles is shaping with stories suitable for both children and adults."

Another palpable difference from previous years is the emergence of a mini-boom in the Italian animation scene. "I believe this has to do with the fact that Italian independent producers were able to create strong connections and collaborations with an immense network of partners, particularly in Europe and Asia," says Bastiancich. "Today the number of hours of animation produced and co-produced by Italians is quite significant, especially considering that, unlike other countries, the only broadcaster actively producing in Italy is RAI."

One topic that never seems to grow old is the rivalry between 2D and CG animation on the small screen. Bastiancich says that only a few years ago, many believed that the action-adventure genre was going to be dominated by CG animation. However, today the technology is more visible in preschool productions such as *My*

*Friends Tigger and Pooh* and *The Backyardigans*. "The extraordinary success of computer-generated animation in feature films has not led to similar achievements in TV productions," he says. "During last year's festival, we presented a few images from famous Italian director Bruno Bozzetto's new CG-animated series. We eagerly await this important project which is a sitcom with a main character similar to Woody Allen. From what we've seen so far, it should be very interesting." *Molto interessante*, indeed! ■

For more info about this year's festival, visit [www.cartoonsbay.com](http://www.cartoonsbay.com).



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Donkey Xote (Filmax)

# Toon Producers Take the Reins in Spain

by Lisa Goldman

Judging from the number of world-class series and features in production and distribution in 2008, Spain is quickly becoming one of the most prolific animation hubs of Europe. Last month, at Germany's Cartoon Movie event, Spanish studios presented three of the 10 completed animated features (Filmax delivered *Nocturna* and *Donkey Xote*, and Forma Anima-da S.L.L. offered *Mocland, the Legend of the Aloma*) and talked about 25 projects in various stages of development and production.

Dygra Films in Corunna is also shopping two CG-animated features *Spirit of the Forest* and *Holy Night!* in 2008, while Perro Verde will release the CG-animated feature *The Missing Lynx* this Christmas, which is a co-production with Kandor Graphics and Antonio Banderas' Green Moon Productions.

Meanwhile, TV production and distribution companies such as BRB Internacional, Cromosoma and Imira (formerly Icon Animation) are also delivering high-quality animated series to fans in many territories.

As Carlos Biern, head of co-productions & licensing at BRB Internacional proudly points out, "We have awesome creativity you can't find anywhere else in the world. The animation from Spain is bright, alive, colorful and with great skills in CG productions." BRB

has had a huge success with its *Iron Kid* toon (which airs in the U.S. as *Eon Kid* on Kids' WB!), and continues to sell many of its hot titles—*Bernard*, *The Imp*, *Angus & Cheryl*, *Papawa* and *Khudayana*, to name a few—globally.

Although some of these TV entities take advantage of Spain's local broadcasters, there are still many hurdles to overcome. Sergi Reigt, managing director of Imira Entertainment, says, "The Spanish industry has done wonders in the past years to successfully renew itself with high-quality projects sold worldwide, such as Imira's *Lola & Virginia* and *Sandra, the Fairytale Detective*, BRB's *Bernard* and Zinkia's *Pocoyo*—just to name a few. And this was done with very limited support from Spanish broadcasters."

Imira unveils the new 2D-animated series *Tangerine & Cow* (about a dysfunctional family living with a cow) at MIPTV this year. Co-produced with France 3, the comedy targets pre-teen audiences and is based on the Chico Mandarin comic books penned by Jacques Azam.

## Spanish Flavors

Barcelona's Cromosoma, the studio behind the series *The Triplets* and this year's CG-animated high-def show *Asha* (a pre-teen show about friendship between multicultural characters)

is another one of the big TV players in the region. Dani Martínez, the head of production at the company's Digit@l 360, says, "We offer a very good balance between creativity, quality and price in Spain. It can be a very good choice to produce or get quality services here, whether it's pre-production, CGI or digital 2D—and you have the added bonus of being located in a European country with low prices and a very good geographic location."

New co-production treaties and laws are also drawing more business to the country. Reigt explains, "As we are still waiting for the new co-production treaty currently in negotiation with RTVE to be finalized, which would support Spanish producers in their financing efforts, we had to develop strength in international distribution to successfully finance our programs. On the other hand, the new audio-visual law which passed last December and regulates financing, now covers the production of TV series and sets up obligations for RTVE to co-produce. This goes for both live action and animation."

He also points out that the ICAA (Instituto de Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales) is now obligated to finance animation projects as well. "This is a new way for animation producers to receive funds. It can be compared to a very 'light' version of the CNC in France, light in the value of funding available, which is currently the object of intense negotiations between the industry and the Spanish



Carlos Biern



Manuel Cristobal



Paco Rodriguez



Sergi Reigt



The Missing Lynx  
(Perro Verde/Kandor  
Graphics/Green Moon)



Tangerine & Cow  
(Imira)



government."

In spite of all the problems faced by producers, Paco Rodríguez, exec producer at Filmax Animation, says the Spanish creative community will rise to meet the challenges and find new ways of financing projects. "Private broadcasters maintain their lack of interest in investing in Spanish TV series productions," adds Rodríguez. "This might slow down the production slate for awhile. Concerning animated feature films, the rules of the financing game are still the same as any regular fiction feature film."

Then there's the problem of piracy in Spain. As Manuel Cristobal, CEO of Perro Verde Films points out, "Regarding the animation scene, I think we have good opportunities although piracy is an issue we have to talk about. It was so noticeable that it led to the creation of Contentpolis in the Murcia Region." Contentpolis is a project designed by the Murcia region in Spain to propel the regional audio-visual sector's growth, and to attract members of the animation and videogame industry to the region. (You can learn more about it on [www.contentpolis.es](http://www.contentpolis.es).)

Cristobal and his team at Perro Verde continue to push the creative envelope with two highly original feature animation projects. The studio's \$2 million feature, the puppet-animated *Zombie Western* is expected to draw a huge cult following around the world. The studio had a major multi-platform hit last year with *Going Nuts*, stop-motion animated feature made with illustrated peanuts, which was described as a "psychiatric asylum horror action movie!"

BRB's Biern acknowledges how difficult the market has

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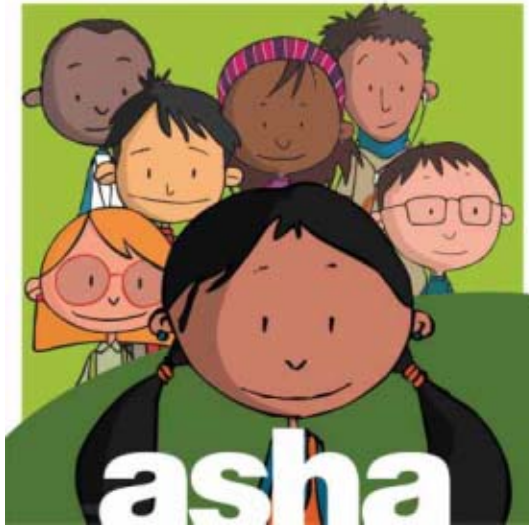


become for independent producers and for those starting in the business. "Public and private free TV channels are reducing their animated slots dramatically and are more and more into acquiring cheap live-action programming for teens produced in Latin America, Australia or Canada. The regional channels, such as TVC (Televisió de Catalunya), are still supporting the slots for animation and acquiring and/or co-producing with animation producers of the regions and looking for new trends and ideas. The bad news is that their ratings and audience shares are much smaller to work out licensing successfully in this country."

### The Art of Creative Financing

Strengths do emerge from weakness, as Imira's Reitz comments, "From having no financing support from Spain in terms of public funding, and no quota system like France, we have had to finance our projects on the international market, which made us very strong

Cromosoma's new series Asha



in distribution in Europe and worldwide, as we've successfully established close relationships with all main broadcasters."

Filmax's Rodríguez expresses his concerns about losing homegrown talent to other countries: "Unfortunately, we are still a country that lacks a certain recognition of an 'industry' that desperately needs continuity in its investments to maintain a workflow and la-

bor force. Otherwise, our talent—which is key in this business—will be drained by other foreign industries, as this is already happening."

Add to all that the fact that Spanish consumer habits are moving to new entertainment platforms and away from traditional TV and standard DVDs. Licensing deals are also difficult to get. DIBOOS, the association of animation producers, fights on. "They are working with ICAA (Spanish film institute) and RTVE on the renewal of the agreement we had for the last few years that was for 12 million euros in three years,"

explains Biern.

Reitz agrees, "Once the negotiations with RTVE are finalized to renew the co-production treaty with the Spanish industry, we will be back on track. Otherwise, [TVC channel] TV3 is a leader in Spain supporting animation companies as it funds between 450,000 and 900,000 euros per series, at a pace of three series per year. Additionally, the Ministry of Culture of Catalunya

# MARVEL ANIMATION 2009



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supports the production of pilots each year."

### La Futura: The Road Ahead

So what would everyone like to see happen in the next couple of years? All of the animation producers we contacted for this piece remain optimistic. Cristobal says he's waiting to see what the next business model will be, and he is hoping for many interesting projects to come out of Perro Verde. Reitg has hopes for significant support from the Spanish government and ICIC and more involvement from TV3 and RTVE.

Rodríguez believes that the new business models for emerging technologies will have to be defined more clearly. "We have to learn now how to target the new way of consuming content," he adds. "We have to adapt to a new way of narrative in terms of taste. There will be a migration of the audience toward new forms of leisure within the

Perro Verde's  
Zombie Western



Web, where the techno-generation fond of new devices might take away from traditional TV viewing."

Cromosoma's head of development and co-production Toni Marin is also buckling up for more changes in the next few years. "The traditional power relationships between players around TV as an industry core are disappearing, and more relationships are being reshaped by broadband Internet possibilities and multiple channels," says Marin. "The market is now more competitive and global, but at the same time, creators have more freedom than

before, without being fully integrated inside the industry."

BRB's Biern concludes that there will probably be fewer animation studios left standing in the long run, but they'll be stronger on the international level. He believes that CG animation will continue to dominate, and Spanish videogame producers will thrive. "We have a lot of international experience which works very well on the licensing side as well. It helps to 'squeeze the orange' that we need in terms of revenues internationally." By all accounts, it certainly seems like the world will continue to enjoy more sweet animation "juice" flowing from the creative teams in Spain in the years ahead. ■

**Lisa Goldman is a New York-based writer who specializes in animated TV series and features. She can be reached at [lisagoldman@yahoo.com](mailto:lisagoldman@yahoo.com).**

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# Just Press Play

After several years of serving as promotional tools for traditional outlets, new media platforms such as Hulu and PBS KIDS PLAY are finally beginning to thrive and generating revenue. **by Ryan Ball**

**V**ideo and other rich media content have been on the web for a while now, but the term "new media" still applies because the field is constantly changing with the rapid pace of technology and the appetite of the average consumer. With web surfers reluctant to pay for online content when there's so much to be found for free, producers have been struggling

to find a good business model for web ventures. For the most part, the Internet has been a vehicle for promoting traditional media platforms, but the tide is shifting.

For the past several years, broadcast networks, major studios and independent producers have all been sinking money and effort into new media initiatives, mainly for fear of being left behind or falling out of touch with a viewing public that spends as much, if not more, time in front of a computer as they do a TV set. Sometimes the moves seem counter-intuitive. Broadcast networks such as ABC in the U.S. stream full-length episodes of hit series with limited commercial breaks, diminishing the need for appointment TV. But what ABC and other outlets understand is that, more and more,

people want to watch shows and movies when they want to watch them, and that the traditional network lineup may be an endangered species.

In one of the boldest moves into this new arena, News Corp./Fox and NBC Universal teamed to launch [Hulu.com](http://Hulu.com) in mid-March. Independently operated, the site features thousands of hours of programming, from episodes of cur-

ership away from their bread-and-butter broadcasts? Insiders we've talked to say no.

Christina Lee, Hulu's director of corporate communications, tells us that the site's on-demand aspect allows people to sample programs they wouldn't otherwise pencil into their busy schedules. "We're finding that people are discovering content through Hulu, and, in many cases, are becoming an audience for television as well," she remarks. "Right now I think it's too early to say that online video will replace television. I just think that there's always going to be an audience for both."

Still in its infancy, Hulu has managed to attract blue-chip advertisers including Intel, Royal Caribbean, GM, Nissan, Direct TV and Wal-Mart. Time will tell if the platform and others like it will begin to draw advertising away from broadcast, as Internet advertising has largely done to print.

Rather than relying on advertising, a number of online platforms are supported by subscriptions. In the realm of children's content, one of the most successful ventures is Club Penguin. The entertainment service was launched by New Horizon Interactive in 2005 and had logged more than 700,000 paid monthly subscriptions by the summer of 2007. Many parents found that it was worth it to pay \$6 a month for a safe, ad-free, self-contained web environment that even preschoolers can navigate on their own. The Walt Disney Co. took note and acquired the site in August of last year.

Hot on Club Penguin's heels is PBS KIDS PLAY!, a new adaptive learning environment developed in partnership with Tribal Nova Inc. and powered by its KidStudio technology. Pierre Le Lann, Tribal Nova's part-

"We have over 60 different TV characters and more than 400 games and videos, so we are aggregating in one place a lot of content so kids don't necessarily have to jump from one site to another."

—Tribal Nova's partner Pierre Le Lann

rent hit TV series such as *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* to full-length movies including *Ice Age* and *Titan A.E.* The content is ad-supported, but the advertising is only about 25 percent of what one finds on television. So are these networks at risk of drawing view-



**Homer's New Home:** [Hulu.com](http://Hulu.com), which launched in mid-March, offers thousands of hours of programming including popular animated titles such as *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*.



ners, tell us that by paying \$9.95 a month, parents may actually end up saving money by not having to buy all the toys and other products marketed to kids on the free sites. "If you go to any of the broadcasters' sites, you do find a number of games, but you're totally bombarded with advertising," he

notes. "Also, in KidStudio, we have over 60 different TV characters and more than 400 games and videos, so we're aggregating in one place a lot of content so kids don't necessarily have to jump from one site to another." KidStudio was launched in France in October and recently debuted in Canada. U.S. and U.K. versions will hit the web in the next couple of months.

One subscription- and pay-per-view-based site catering to adults with edgy animated and live-action content is CrushedPlanet, which was one of the new media pioneers. Created by brothers Joe and Harry Gantz, the site featured provocative documentaries and other videos online back when compression and bandwidth only allowed for a viewing area roughly the size of a postage stamp. Technology restrictions kept it from becoming must-see Internet TV, and it was shelved as the Gantz brothers went on to create the popular reality series *Taxi Cab Confessions* for HBO. Now, CrushedPlanet is back online at [www.crushedplanet.com](http://www.crushedplanet.com) and is

beginning to build an audience.

Joe Gantz says the new vision for CrushedPlanet is to become the web's answer to HBO or Showtime, offering the kind of content that traditional networks tend to shy away from. He comments, "Right now, people are not used to paying for the Internet, but within a year or two, you'll come home and sit in front of your TV and say, 'Honey, do you want to watch Internet or regular TV?' That technology exists now, but people don't use it. In two years, everybody will be using it, and whether you're paying for an online network or a TV network will be immaterial."

Gantz also asserts that viewers don't want to go online to find the same content that is offered on TV. Television producers are even trying to tap into the popularity of viral video with weekly shows such as Fox's *TMZ TV* and VH1's *Web Junk*. One of the most successful new media ventures has, of course, been YouTube, the leader in viral video. While broadcast and cable outlets

have been working to sell viewers on high-definition (HD) TV, the coveted 18-34 demographic has been



flocking to the web to watch grainy, poorly compressed video, much of it created by people who would never get a shot at

making a network show. Some of those enterprising video makers have, in fact landed broadcast development deals based on their YouTube popularity.

Popular animated series that have made the leap from new media to broadcast include Donick Cary's political satire *Lil' Bush*, which is now in its second season on Comedy Central, and the CG mystery *Afterworld* from Emmy-nominated producer Stan Rogow and TV and video-game writer Brent Friedman of Electric Farm Ent. Following its debut on Anheuser-Busch's Bud.TV, *Afterworld* was acquired by Sony Pictures Television International and broadcast internationally. SPTI has also developing two other multi-platform series including *Gemini Division*, a live-action/CG sci-fi webisodic starring Rosario Dawson.

Marie Jacobson, senior VP of programming and production for SPTI, says the new media platforms offer the unit fertile ground for nurturing talent and farming new properties to possibly morph into television shows, feature films and online games. "But as stand-alone elements, they're proving to be good little business," she remarks. "Advertisers obviously love the multiple

touch-point promise that comes with some of these products, and they're less concerned about exact impressions as they are association with product that spills over onto multiple platforms. The idea is that these blow up into big brands and the payback is big for everybody." ■







# The Faux Asian Gentlemen of Oxford

The British duo behind Tokyoplastic moves from creating innovative spots to the world of indie shorts and feature projects. [by Ellen Wolff](#)

**W**hen the agency creatives at McCann-Erickson in San Francisco first visited the website for Tokyoplastic, they believed that they had come across an innovative Japanese animation outfit. With a name like Tokyoplastic and a site that displays signature motifs of geisha dolls and robots that unfold like industrial-strength origami, it's a natural assumption. When the ad team invited Tokyoplastic to bid on a nine-spot Microsoft campaign, they didn't realize they were actually contacting two Brits working from their homes in Oxford, England.

Sam Lanyon Jones, who co-founded the studio with Andrew Cope, recalls wondering how they'd confess that they were "just two pasty English guys." The duo considered hiring Sumo wrestlers to accompany them to the McCann-Erickson pitch meeting, but they opted for

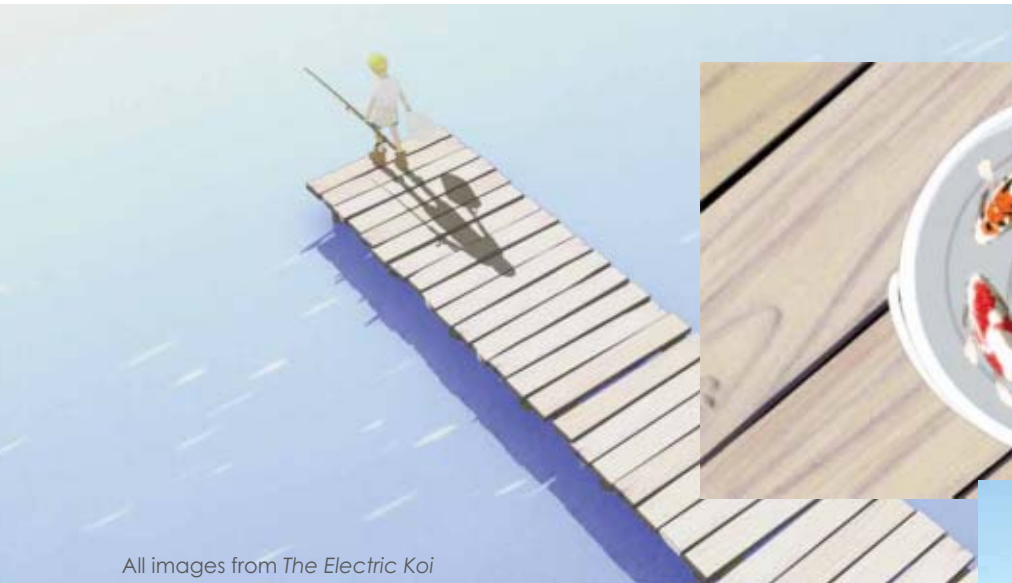
truth and landed the job anyway.

Several animated campaigns later, Tokyoplastic has amassed a client list that includes Toyota, Motorola, MTV and Mitsubishi, and they're repped by London-based Picasso Pictures. But Jones admits, "We didn't have our sights set on adver-

tising. We were two guys sitting in their bedrooms doing fun stuff. We saw the potential in the Internet to create something unusual, and take people on a strange journey with our website. It went completely viral, and we started getting approached by production companies. The Internet was the best route into the industry for us. It's a level playing field. If you produce something of quality online, everyone will see it eventually, which is so unusual. Industries like graphic design and advertising have so many closed doors. The Internet blew them open."

Now that Tokyoplastic has built a team of 15 animators working in a London studio, they're looking beyond commercials toward original shorts—and with any





All images from *The Electric Koi*



Sam Lanyon Jones (on left) and Andrew Cope (on right)

their *Drum Machine* won Sundance's online animation prize. To further raise their profile, Tokyoplastic is producing a suite of four short films, each running between five and eight minutes. They'd planned to finance the films themselves, but production was barely underway on the first film, *The Electric Koi*, when the BBC Film Network's senior producer Claire Cook came calling. "Claire was blown away by it," says Jones. "She thought we'd be ideal for a start-up company in Italy called QOOB. They've given us about

luck—feature films. Their short *The Little Fella* (originally developed for DreamWorks) has been picked up by sites around the world, while

QOOB. The channel will premiere the film on QOOB TV, and online on their site in spring 2008. Once the films have had their international and U.K. premieres we would then like to showcase them on the BBC Film Network site, too."

But anyone who thinks they'll recognize these films as "typical Tokyoplastic" animation should think again. The first two films completed, *Electric Koi* and *The Praying Machine*, represent a distinct departure from the shape-shifting animation that marks Tokyoplastic's commercials. They blend a hand-painted look with CG, animated in Autodesk 3ds Max. They also employ Mental Images' mental ray for rendering, Adobe Premiere for editing and After Effects for compositing. "The intention was to create something that looked like a watercolor in 2.5D," says Jones. "Our team has consistently stayed at around three or four animators,



mer fading into autumn, and Jones notes, "There's a sense of loss at the end. *The Autumn Sea* is an archetypal drama that also deals with loss. Our winter film, *The Praying Machine*, is more like a music video. We don't know what will happen in the fourth one. Thematically and stylistically they're connected but they're very different in terms of genre as well as content."

While *Electric Koi* seems at first to be a pastoral summertime piece, it evolves into a tale of betrayal. It centers on an androgynous blond Eurasian child who inhabits a ramshackle seaside town that appears both rural and post-industrial. As Jones admits, "We wanted to produce something enigmatic that evoked feelings but didn't provide all the answers."

The BBC's Cook imagines presenting the four films together, perhaps even getting them played in cinemas as a mini-feature, which would suit Jones and Cope just fine as they look towards tackling something new. "We're doing these films for the same reason that we started doing Tokyoplastic five years ago," says Jones. "When we feel like we haven't taken any risks in a long time, we start getting itchy minds." ■

Learn more about the dynamic duo on [www.tokyoplastic.com](http://www.tokyoplastic.com).

"We didn't have our sights set on advertising. We were two guys sitting in their bedrooms doing fun stuff. We saw the potential in the Internet to create something unusual, and take people on a strange journey with our website."

—Sam Lanyon Jones, co-founder of Tokyoplastic

half of the budget, and they get the right to show our films on TV in Italy, France, Spain, Sweden and—our favorite—Vatican City. Can't you picture the Pope kicking back and watching a Tokyoplastic film with his MTV?"

Cook adds, "I recommended the project to Lucia Nicolai, the commissioner at

modelers and renderers. Andy did all the sound, and he and I pitch in as much as we can. So we have two directors, which seems like an unfair ratio!"

While the films don't share characters or locales, they're designed to reflect elements from each of the four seasons. *Electric Koi* explores the feeling of sum-



# Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



## The Foundry's Nuke V. 5.0

**N**uke is a compositing system developed within the walls of visual effects company Digital Domain tailored for pipelines that move terabytes of data through the network. In fact, its development team was given a special Technical Achievement Oscar in 2002. That's why the tool has really been put through the paces, and has reached high levels of sophistication.

Last February, The Foundry released Nuke v. 5.0 with an entirely new user interface, support for stereoscopic

dows were modular, including the view-port window for looking at the resulting composite. This was obviously a little intimidating for someone just starting out. It's akin to giving an artist a chisel, hammer and a block of concrete and saying "SCULPT!" In this latest iteration, the interface is set up very similar to Shake and Fusion where you have your view-port, your work area and the tool parameters. It at least gives you a place to start and to feel comfortable. These panes can be moved around and the layout saved so that you can make your Nuke your own. Or, if you are hardcore Nuke, you can make the panes float, so it's reminiscent of the

see a whole lot of home users going out and making stereoscopic films, but, hey, its there for the companies out there who have leapt into that ocean like an Acapulco cliff diver.

At \$3,500, its less expensive than Digital Fusion, and since Shake support was dropped by Apple, Nuke has become really attractive. I predict it supplanting Shake as the compositor of choice. But .... that's just me!

**Website:** [www.thefoundry.co.uk](http://www.thefoundry.co.uk)

**Price:** \$3,500

## Frantic Films' Krakatoa

**F**rantic Films started out as a little visual effects house somewhere in the upper reaches of Canada where you had to hire Inuit guides to lead you through the frozen tundra in order to have dailies. But somehow, the company has survived and thrived, not only working on shows earning awards left and right, but also developing its own software and offering it to the masses to make others' lives better.

I believe Frantic is best known for its render queue manager, Deadline, and its also offers Flood, which simulates water and ocean surfaces, and Amaretto which provides a conduit from 3ds Max to the NVidia Gelato renderer. But today, boys and girls, we are going to discuss Krakatoa: No, not the volcano in the South Seas which violently erupted around the turn of the 19th century, but Frantic's particle rendering and management system.

So what is a particle rendering and management system? It's not a particle animation and simulation system; Krakatoa takes the data from other particle systems like Particle Flow, Thinking Particles and RealFlow. Presumably, if you can export data from Maya or Houdini into a CSV format, you can utilize the magic that is Krakatoa. (And yes, the Frantic Films folks tell us that this tool has been used



images and Python scripting. It has retained its robustness, but has also become compatible for users migrating from different platforms—at least, other node-based platforms. Artists coming from Digital Fusion or Shake will like the UI update. After Effects and Combustion users will still have a bit of a learning curve, since Timeline/Layer compositing requires a different mindset than node-based compositing. However ... I don't want to get sucked into a diatribe about the pros and cons of the two methods, so lets get back to the goodies.

In earlier iterations, Nuke was basically a black page with some icons jammed into the top and sides. All win-

dows were modular, including the view-port window for looking at the resulting composite. This was obviously a little intimidating for someone just starting out. It's akin to giving an artist a chisel, hammer and a block of concrete and saying "SCULPT!" In this latest iteration, the interface is set up very similar to Shake and Fusion where you have your view-port, your work area and the tool parameters. It at least gives you a place to start and to feel comfortable. These panes can be moved around and the layout saved so that you can make your Nuke your own. Or, if you are hardcore Nuke, you can make the panes float, so it's reminiscent of the

bygone days of 4.8. In addition to the main panels, they've thrown in, for good measure, a Curve Editor to edit animation and a Script Editor, for editing Python and TCL code.

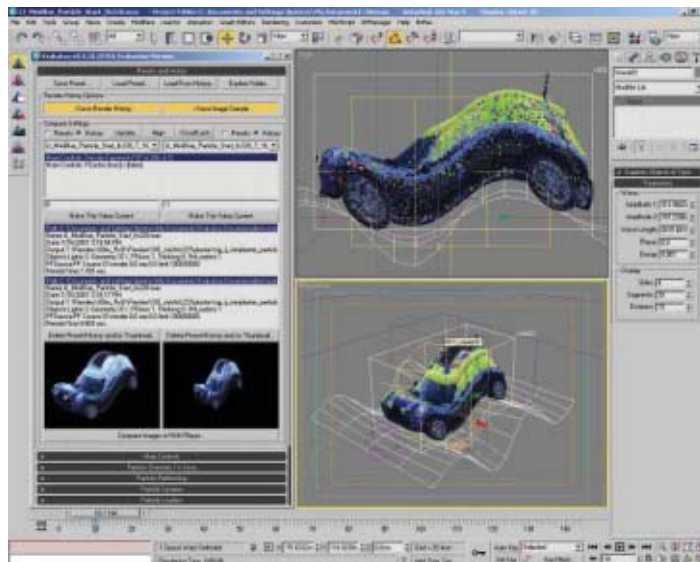
Python is the nextnewaddition to Nuke, which is a real boon. TCL scripting is a little cumbersome, and I'm not a fan. Python is more widely used and established. The language choice is smart because you can find a lot more Python aficionados, and it has really become the glue of a lot of major visual effects pipelines (or the dreams that stuff is made from!).

The last major addition to Nuke is support for stereoscopic projects, which, in layman's terms means 3-D, and not Maya or Max 3D, but, like *Creature from the Black Lagoon* 3-D—or for younger crowds, *Beowulf* 3-D. In fact, I'm pretty sure that a lot of the tools were developed during the 3-Dization of Disney's *Meet the Robinsons* while it went through Digital Domain. I don't

to generate many of the vfx and elements that we've seen and loved in movies such as *Superman Returns*, *Journey 3D* and *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium*.)

The rendering part of Krakatoa takes the particles from Max and renders with sophisticated options like volumetric lighting, which is what really gives your particle system mass because you are incorporating shadows, modeled lighting and self shadowing. Color and opacity are inherited from Max, and blending can be incorporated to get depth passes based on world space to camera space. Furthermore, Krak can cache the particles into RAM before lighting, allowing quick feedback when changing lights or camera positions.

This is all well and good. But the benefits of Krakatoa become more



evident when the management part kicks in. You see, one of the big things using particle systems to simulate real-world events is that you need tons and tons of data. All this data in the real world comes for free. In the digital universe, it's very expensive in terms of RAM and CPU cycles. Krakatoa

enables more particles to be brought into the renderer by partitioning the systems, re-evaluating the same systems multiple times and changing the seeds of the systems. As a result, the render is filled out with fewer particle calculations. And once caches have been made, they can be combined and imported back into Max and further manipulated by deformations and lattice warps or whatever you want. You can even shape 'em into a teapot if that sort of thing puts a smile on your face!

**Website:** [www.franticfilms.com/software](http://www.franticfilms.com/software)

**Price:** \$1,495 (professional bundle); \$374 (upgrade and support) ■

Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and vfx supervisor of Max Ink Productions. He can be reached at [ducky@maxinkcafe.com](mailto:ducky@maxinkcafe.com).





# Digital Magic

by Christopher Grove



## Big Deals in Little Packages

**P**retty amazing what you can get for 50 bucks these days. Smith Micro Software has announced the release of the latest update to its popular 2D animation and cartoon creation software Anime Studio 5.6 for \$49.99. Anime Studio 5.6 is an award-winning animation program that allows users to create 2D movies, cartoons, anime or cutout animations in the vein of *South Park* or your favorite JibJab cartoons.

The new version (Mac OSX and Windows) includes animated layer reordering, updates to image warping for the texture fill effect and new functionality for path animation, allowing users to easily control the movement of animated objects. "We're committed to enhancing and expanding Anime Studio into a premier 2D design solution and believe that these updates take our software into an entirely new league of design possibilities," says Steve Yatson, Smith Micro senior director of graphics solutions.

Anime Studio utilizes a unique "bone rigging" system normally found only in more expensive 3D graphics software. It streamlines the animation workflow, reduces production time and saves money by requiring a smaller team of animators than is normally used in animation.

Amongst the new features included in the upgrade: Animated Layer Reordering, which lets users reorder the 2D layers in a scene as much as they want during the course of an animation. (This makes it easy to simulate 3D effects, such as objects moving in front of and behind each other); Path Animation, which allows animators to control the movement of a layer using the "Translate Layer" tool by directly clicking and dragging on its path, making it easier to see and control where a layer is going to move over time; and Image Warping for the Texture Fill Effect. Anime Studio 5.6 lets users assign an image file to be used as a texture to fill in vector shapes. Previously, these images would simply be drawn on the canvas in a fixed ori-

entation, but the vector shape would move independently. Now these texture images automatically warp with the vector shape as it gets moved and bent by the bones system, allowing for more realistic texturing of objects. For more info, visit <http://graphics.smithmicro.com>.

### Spotting the Dog

Just as there's always a way to build a better mousetrap, there never seems to be a dearth of animators attempting to make animals talk. Most attempts are either disquieting or as unnecessary as most morph effects. But occasionally, often with humor, someone nails it with a perfect landing. Case in point: a European Volkswagen spot from the animation boffins at Framestore CFC. Featuring a dog lip-syncing to the Spencer Davis Group's "I'm a Man" as he rides in his owner's VW, the commercial's off-kilter sexual undercurrent is the type of insouciance American advertisers think U.S. audiences either can't handle or won't "get."

Created by DDB London and directed by Noam Murro, *VW Polo Dog* is a 30-second spot that started airing recently in the U.K. The big idea of the spot is that the car brings out the bold in anyone who drives it. The contrasting scene to the Jack Russell in the car is the same dog waiting in line at the bank with his mistress. He appears distinctly subdued and is mumbling the song a cappella.

VFX supervisor Stephane Allender attended the four-day shoot in Los Angeles. "It was a pretty straightforward process," he says. "Not least because the dog was so beautifully trained. All of the interior shots of him trembling and cowering were all reactions he could do on command."

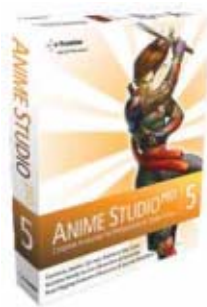
The three-and-a-half weeks of post-production were largely concerned with the animating, texturing, matching and fine-tuning of the 3D elements. Allender painted out the whole of the dog's muzzle. This was tricky in some shots where the dog is seen through the car's reflective windows—made necessary because open windows would have been too windy for the dog. "We made a whole 3D dog's head, even though we knew that it would probably just be the muzzle that was used," says CG lead Diarmid Harrison-Murray. "Because this gave the director plenty of leeway to play with when compositing. It also gave us a bit more to work with when lighting the material."

The CG dog was built and animated using Maya and rendered with mental ray. After initially hoping to use just textures for the dog's skin, the team found that they had to use fur for a couple of the close-ups, which they implemented using Maya's fur tool. "We had to make a dog rig that could move convincingly," says senior animator Dale Newton. And the dog's lips had to be flexible enough to do things that real dogs can do. "Dog lips are potentially far more flexible than human lips. They can flap around in a much more mobile way than ours can. And dogs make many sounds that are quite human."

The animation of the dog mumbling in the bank was not, however, a 3D job. Allender created it all with a mixture of in-camera footage and a little Flame magic. A final touch was the Telecine, created by senior colorist Steffan Perry. "The aim was

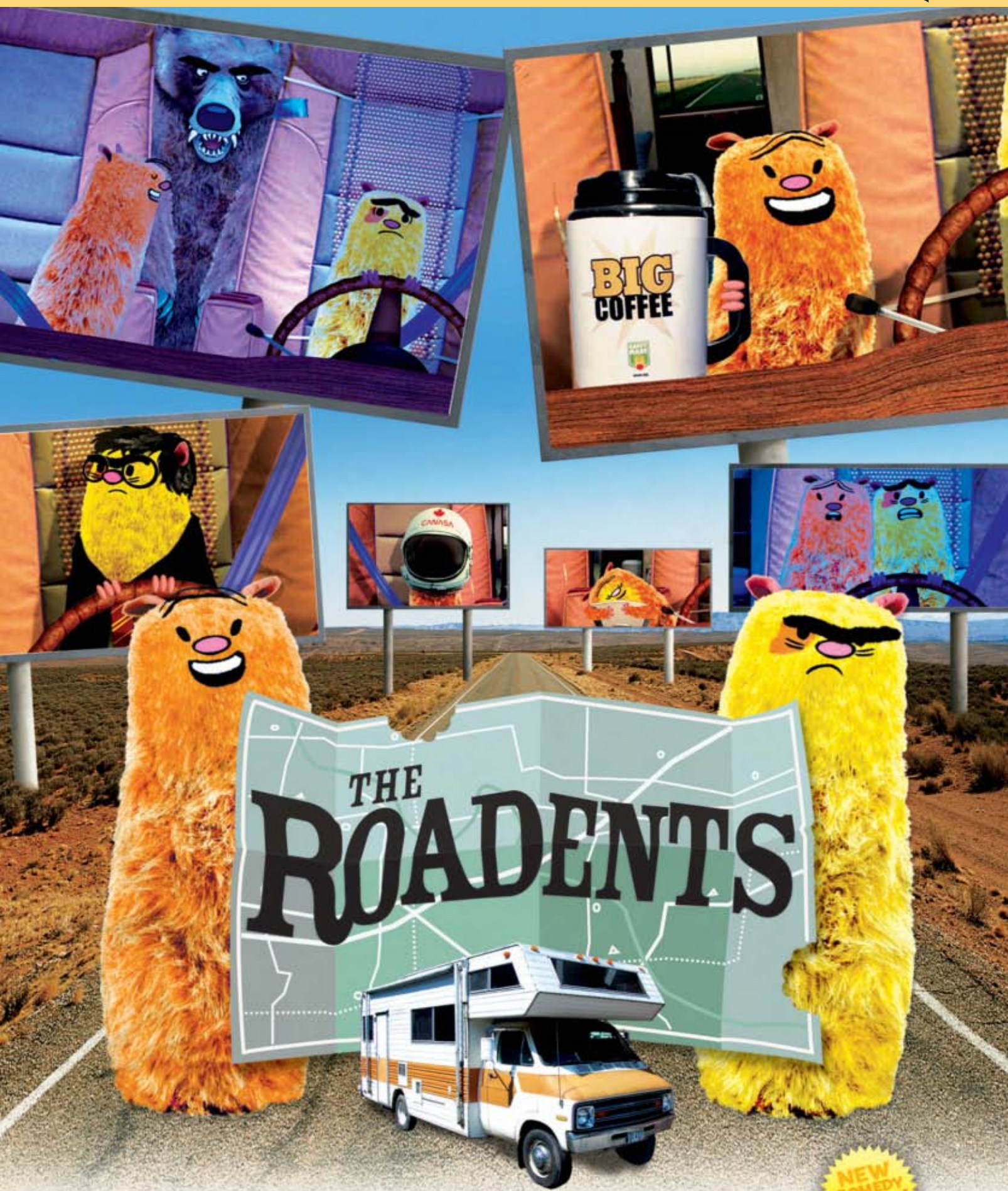
to keep the spot looking warm and upbeat," he says. "The final hero shot of the dog in the car has a slight but distinct golden glow to it." ■

Chris Grove is a Los Angeles-based journalist and actor. If you have ideas for his monthly column, you can email him at [cwlg@earthlink.net](mailto:cwlg@earthlink.net).



VW Polo Dog commercial





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## Centurion City

The new season of Sci Fi Channel's *Battlestar Galactica* offers more delicately rendered robots and jaw-dropping battle scenes. **by Barbara Robertson**

**H**umanity's 50,000 survivors, the ones who happened to be on-board a starship when the robotic Cylons launched a genocidal attack, rocketed into history on Sci Fi Channel's lauded miniseries *Battlestar Galactica*. *Galactica* launched in December 2003 and became the highest-rated cable miniseries that year.

The project's success with fans and critics led to an episodic series in 2004, a second season in 2005, a third between 2005-2007 and a prequel film, *Razor* in November 2007. Named the best show on television in 2005 by such publications as *Time* and *Rolling Stone*, the popular series began its fourth and reportedly final season this spring.

Although *Battlestar Galactica* is set in the future, the technology has a retro look and the environments are gritty and realistic. Sometimes the action takes place in *Survivor*-type landscapes; some-

times on the one remaining warship, the *Galactica*, whose crew safeguards the ragtag fleet of survivors. Although the *Galactica*'s crewmembers are heroic, each has a deep personal flaw and any might be a Cylon in human form. And, even though it's a sci-fi series, the visual effects don't overpower the story.

"We don't showcase new sci-fi stuff in the shows," says visual effects supervisor Gary Hutzel. "We aren't there to do the nebula of the week, to beam down and shoot the inhabitants. The show is

about the struggle the people are going through. We open their environment and make it feel like space." However, Hutzel promises that fans will notice some exciting changes in the final season.

In the beginning, Zoic Studios handled the post-production with, in the second season, help from Atmosphere Visual Effects and Enigma Animation Productions in Vancouver. By the third season, Hutzel began pulling the post-production in-house. Now, around 15 people create *Galactica* effects in offices on the Universal lot, with two composers still working in Vancouver. The Universal crew uses LightWave for modeling, animation, effects and rendering, SynthEyes for tracking, and Combustion for compositing. The Vancouver crew uses Digital Fusion for compositing.

*Battlestar Galactica*'s effects fall into four catego-



Doug Drexler



Gary Hutzel



ries: elaborate digital set extensions, space shots showing the relationships between various space vessels in the fleet, space battles and Centurions, the robots in their mechanical form.

Much of the action takes place on sets that the crew extends and enhances later with digital environments and effects. Even so, Hutzel decided from the beginning that he didn't want to limit the cinematographer to locked-off cameras or motion-control shots. Instead, he decided to track the hand-held camera motion in post.

"When we did the miniseries, doing full post-production 3D camera tracking was a new idea, but it was integral in the way we designed *Galactica*," he says. "The cameraman can shoot what he normally would shoot even if it is a visual-effects shot. It sounds obvious, but it isn't. I never know where the lights are or where the camera will be pointing until the shoot."

To make tracking feasible in post on a television series schedule and budget, Hutzel uses battery-powered LED tracking markers. Before a greenscreen shoot, the crew places some of these markers into the scene. Then, as soon as Hutzel sees cameras hoisted onto shoulders, he and his assistants run into the scene and insert additional markers at the last minute. Sometimes, he even tosses Velcro-backed markers onto the set during the shoot. "I can throw them at the screen from off camera and they'll be visible in the shot," he says.

These markers help the crew using SynthEyes put a virtual camera into LightWave that matches the movement of the onset camera. And that makes it possible for the visual-effects artists to fill the scene with digital sets, space ships, space battles and Centurions from camera view.

In the first two seasons, Centurions were basically stylized killing machines that gave the actors something to shoot at and blow up. As the series progressed, the robots became more agile and athletic. Now, we'll see them onboard their own base ships and interacting with the actors in a more human way. "What we're focusing on this year is seeing more character in the Centurions," Hut-

zel says. "We're focusing on their faces, what they're thinking."

That new characterization affected the Centurions' design: Originally, the robots needed to stand out in the environment. This season, they need to fit into the live-action scenes. "We adjust-

ing the effects crew in-house has opened new opportunities for the fast-paced production. "Editorial is 100 feet from our door, so we can work creatively with the editors, directors and producers," Hutzel says. "Because we can work more interactively in 3D now, and



"What we're focusing on this year is seeing more character in the Centurions. We're focusing on their faces, what they're thinking. We adjusted their surfaces to catch the light better, to give them more expression as they move through the room."

—*Battlestar Galactica's* vfx supervisor Gary Hutzel

ed their surfaces to catch the light better, to give them more expression as they move through the room," Hutzel says. "Once they started interacting with people, they needed to have a more natural look."

LightWave enhancements helped make that possible. "There definitely has been a genesis in the software that has allowed us to progress," he says. "We can render things with more quality at greater speed."

For example, the crew now works in pre-viz with models that have the full geometric shapes of the final objects and renders the shapes with shading and proper lighting albeit using low-res image maps rather than final textures. "We want to see how the lights are working early on," Hutzel says. "In the old days we could only deal with rough shapes, and we didn't have more than a couple ships in frame. That's not the case any more."

That speed-up combined with mov-

because we're doing everything in-house, I can literally go in and recut a scene to show the producers what I want to do within a few days. Until the last year and a half, that took weeks."

For example, Hutzel redesigned an action shot in *Razor* that had actors watching approaching missiles represented as little dots on a tabletop screen. So, Hutzel and the 3D artists pre-viz a more exciting sequence. "We turned three shots of the view screen into a gigantic Pearl Harbor-like attack on the space station," Hutzel says.

And that has led to more interesting battle scenes this season. "In season four, people will see a lot more of what we're famous for. Now that we're doing everything in-house, we're free to do what we want. For us, that's the cornerstone. It's made a big difference." ■

***Battlestar Galactica's* new season begins Friday, April 4, at 10 p.m. (9 p.m. Central) on the Sci Fi Channel.**



# A Question of Taste

Some of today's top working animators/vfx gurus reveal a few of their favorite things!

by Ellen Wolff

It's been said that animators are actors who just happen to be camera-shy. But pros from Pixar, ILM, Sony, DreamWorks, Tippett, WETA, Fox/Blue Sky and Framestore CFC agreed to step into the spotlight and give us a glimpse of the media that turns them on, the trends that turn them off and their all-time fave characters (Ren and Stimpy, anyone?)



## Tim Harrington

ILM's senior animator on *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Tim was animation supervisor on *The Spiderwick Chronicles* and has over a decade of ILM credits, including *War of the Worlds*, *Men in Black*, *Van Helsing* and the *Star Wars* prequels.

**Favorite software:** Maya.

**Favorite animated character:** Jack Skellington (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*).

**Most anticipated movie/TV show of '08:** Pixar's *WALL•E* and *Lost* (ABC).

**Never misses:** Afternoon latte.

**Fave thing on my iPod:** Crystal Method.

**Most annoying trend/catch phrase of the moment:** Multi modality.

**Website/blog I can't seem to stop looking at:** [www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com).

**Advice for job seekers:** People with strong traditional visual arts skills (illustration, photography, sculpture) are the most creative in computer animation.



Jack Skellington  
(*The Nightmare Before Christmas*)



WALL•E



## William Groebe

Animator and character designer for Tippett Studios on *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. His other credits include: *Cloverfield*, *The Golden Compass*, *Enchanted*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Hellboy* and *The Matrix: Revolutions*.

**Favorite software:** Maya 8.5 for animation, Photoshop CS2 for illustration.

**Favorite animated character:** Gromit from *Wallace and Gromit*. I love the subtlety of his expression changes, and how you always



*The Spiderwick Chronicles*

know what he is thinking.

**Most anticipated movie/TV show of '08:** *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. It could be great. It's been a long time since we've seen these characters. I hope the film doesn't just spoof the original movies.

**Never misses:** My wife's birthday or our anniversary!

**Fave thing on my iPod:** I don't own an iPod, but if I did I'd be listening to any music that came out before iPods were invented. Right now I'm on a classic blues kick. Nina Simone is enchanting.

**Most annoying trend/catch phrase of the moment:** "I'm going to friend you."

**Website/blog I can't seem to stop looking at:** [www.ducatimonster.org](http://www.ducatimonster.org). I own a Monster motorcycle. You should, too.

**Advice for job seekers:** Personalize your reel to the style that each company is looking for. Only put your favorite work on your reel, no matter how short your reel becomes. And don't put your first animation—ever—on your reel. It's probably terrible. It may have sentimental value to you, but it's terrible.



Gromit

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## Favorite Things

continued from page 66

**Dan Wagner**

DreamWorks' head of character animation on *Kung Fu Panda*. Dan's credits include *Space Jam*, *The Prince of Egypt*, *The Road to El Dorado*, *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas* and *Shrek 2*.

**Favorite software:** EMO.

**Favorite animated character:** Shere Khan from Disney's *The Jungle Book*.

**Most anticipated movie/TV show of 2008:** *Indiana Jones 4*.

**Never misses:** A day without a Slurpee.

**Fave thing on my iPod:** I listen to Internet radio and love new age mix.



**Most annoying trend of the moment:** Reality TV shows.

**Website/blog I can't seem to stop looking at:** [www.calgaryflames.com](http://www.calgaryflames.com).

**Advice for job seekers:** Forget about showing life drawings on your reel. Just show good character acting and sound animation mechanics. Animators from big or small studio environments are, for the most part, pretty easy going and friendly, so don't let the stature of a huge animation studio intimidate you.

**Peter Giliberti**

Sony's animation supervisor on *Hancock*. His previous credits include *Beowulf* and all three *Spider-Man* movies.

**Favorite software:** Maya.

**Favorite animated character:** Ren from *Ren and Stimpy*, for his over-the-top and pushed expressions. Not worrying about volume changes with the character and focusing on getting the expressions to read was what made him great.

**Most anticipated movie/TV show of 2008:** Summer is going to be great for superheroes: *Batman 2*, *Hellboy 2* and of course, the first drunken, belligerent superhero: *Hancock*.

**Never misses:** *The Simpsons* or *Seinfeld* episodes whenever they are on. No matter how many times you see a rerun, they keep getting funnier. Also any new horror movies that come out in theaters. I'll watch horror any time I can.



**Fave thing on my iPod:** Everything on my iPod is my favorite. That's why it's on my iPod!

**Most annoying trend of the moment:** As long as it's not forced down anyone's throat or hurting anyone, say or wear whatever you feel like.

**Website/blog I can't seem to stop looking at:** [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)—At least 10 times a day to watch old cartoons or movies I haven't seen since I was a kid.

**Advice for job seekers:** Always stay humble and modest with your work.

**Jamie Beard**

WETA Digital's animation supervisor currently working on *Tintin*. Jamie's credits include *Dinotopia*, *Harry Potter 2*, *Ella Enchanted*, *Lord of The Rings: Return of The King*, *I-Robot*, *King Kong*, *X-Men 3*, *The Waterhorse*.

**Favorite software:** Online birthday reminder! You never forget birthdays!

**Favorite animated character:** The Great Owl from *The Secret of NIMH*. His character was built-up in the earlier scenes so well that very little on-screen time was needed for a huge impact. The animators were then able to focus on quality, not quantity.

**Most anticipated movie of 2008:** *Indiana Jones 4*.



**Never misses:** Brad Bird's movies.



**Fave thing on my iPod:** Hot Chip—on my Nokia!

**Most annoying trend of the moment:** iPhones.

**Website/blog I can't seem to stop looking at:** [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and the Scrabble application.

**Advice for job seekers:** Talent and enthusiasm are paramount, but represent yourself in the best possible light. Reels should have polish and good presentation.

continued on page 70

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## Favorite Things

continued from page 68

**Dale Newton**

Framestore CFC's senior animator. His credits include the current Volkswagen Polo commercial with the dog singing "I'm a Man;" the Chemical Bros. "Salmon Dance" promo and the *Stork* spot for [Monster.com](http://Monster.com). Dale also directed Orange's *Life As You Like It*.

**Favorite software:** Software that becomes invisible while you work. Maya and Photoshop are like this for me. Though it's fun to ditch the computer altogether and do pencil and paper from time to time.

**Favorite animated characters:** The adorably subversive, incomparable Ren and Stimpy.

**Most anticipated movie of 2008:** Jeez! That's difficult. Pixar seems to be upping their game time and time again. And the

Salmon Dance



trailer for *Horton Hears A Who!* looks great. There are also brilliant animated shorts every year, and always surprises.

**Never misses:** Films written by or starring Simon Pegg. Great comedy. *News At 11*—the ultimate soapie.

**Favorite thing on my iPod:** Don't have one, but if I did I'd listen to Radiohead, which keeps me sober. Or my collection of '80s tunes to lull me into a fuzzy sentimental/serendipitous stupor.

**Website/blog I can't stop looking at:** [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), etc. OK, OK, I just can't help myself!

**Advice for job seekers:** Work hard and take chances!



Horton Hears A Who!

**Angus MacLane**

Pixar's directing animator on *WALL•E*. Angus has over a decade's experience as a Pixar animator—on *Ratatouille*, *Cars*, *The Incredibles*, *Finding Nemo*, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Toy Story 2* and *A Bug's Life*.

**Favorite software:** Pitch Doctor, Pixar's proprietary storyboarding software.

**Favorite animated character:** Nelvana's animation of Boba Fett in *The Star Wars Holiday Special* was pretty sweet.

**Most anticipated movie/TV show of 2008:** HBO's *The Wire*.

**Never misses:** Lebowsky Fest West.

**Fave thing on my iPod:** Robert Evans reading his autobiography *The Kid Stays in the Picture* and the RiffTrax audio commentary to *Point Break*.

**Most annoying trend of the moment:** People having such low expectations for quality that they are willing to pay money for a movie even when they believe the movie will be bad.

**Website/blog I can't seem to stop looking at:** [www.brothers-brick.com](http://www.brothers-brick.com).

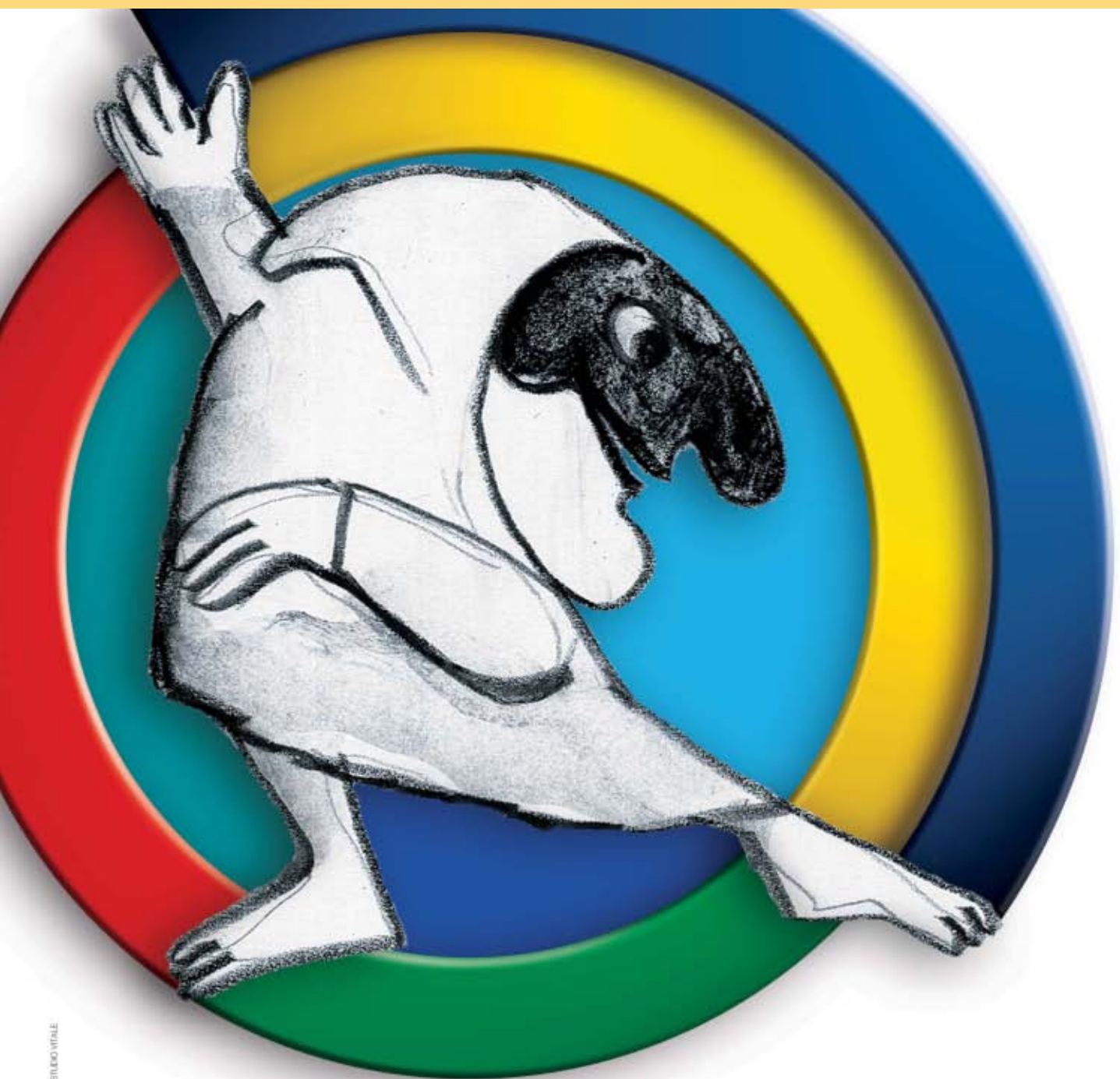
**Advice for job seekers:** Surround yourself with a group of like-minded creative individuals whose work you respect. Push each other to become better artists through honest and constructive critiques. Hone your drawing skills and study acting. When you get the job, repeat this process! ■



Star Wars Holiday Special



WALL•E



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# Big Trouble in Ancient China

Ron Simonson reveals (only a few of) the secrets of building the fantasy world of *The Forbidden Kingdom*.

by Ron Magid

**Y**ou can look at Rob Minkoff's new action-packed movie *The Forbidden Kingdom* as the director's brave foray into the *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* school of martial-arts filmmaking. This millennial version of *Big Trouble in Little China* relied on the services of a whopping 10 vfx vendors, three of whom were located in Korea (Macrograph, DTI and Foot-

age), another in Hong Kong (Asia Legend), one in Beijing (Xing Xing) and the rest state-side (Svengali, Illusion Arts, Stingray VFX, Digiscope and Frantic Films).

With less than six months post-production time, the challenge for overall visual effects supervisor Ron Simonson (Emmy nominee for the HBO miniseries *Angels in America*) was riding hard on the original 900-shot

workload. The tasks ran the gamut from creating digital stunt doubles to the delivery of magical weaponry such as levitating spears and key energy effects for embers and smoke aplenty. Amazingly, Simonson brought all the work in on the scant 4.5 million dollar budget.

The film opens in contemporary Boston's Chinatown, where Jason Tripitikas (Michael Angarano) gets in a fight, falls off a building and lands—in the fantasy world of the forbidden kingdom. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the international vfx team was recreating Boston without shooting in the U.S. and devising the titular forbidden kingdom—with its oversized, colorful Wizard of Oz look—out of entirely whole digital cloth. A greenscreen shoot in China on a small street set of Boston was blended with other Chinese architecture filmed on location plus 3D models and background tile plates of Boston, skillfully assembled by Stingray VFX.

Tripitikas awakens in the fantasy world of the legendary Middle Kingdom, perched atop the Five Element Mountain, an iconic hand-shaped mountain range. "That's really almost a character," Simonson says. "A lot of that came from production designer Bill Brzeski, whose sketches went into pre-viz and the artists developed it from there. The palace where the evil warlord lives is dark looking, but the mountains, which are in



Rocco Gioffre



Ron Simonson





**Kingdom Come:** Svengali's artists faced the challenge of transforming DTL's clean digital model to a believable representation of a time-worn sinister palace built of fitted stone with five-tiered Asian temple-style roofs.

the clouds, had a colorful fantasy look."

Four visual effects houses worked together to breathe life into the forbidden kingdom, and each company's work frequently had to cut together and/or share elements with the others, which meant continuity was key. Simonson hired legendary matte artist Michelle Moen to create concept art that was given to the companies to follow. "Rob wanted a recognizable, evil-ish cloud hanging over the mountains all the time and they all had to look the same," Simonson says. "Illusion Arts' shots join scenes together so they had to mesh with those of DTL, Macrograph and Svengali. Although they shared the same 3D model, they didn't really share too many elements, so the matte paintings were all done separately."

Svengali, headed by matte master Roc-

Each level of the huge edifice boasts patios, pillars, windows and walkways. Svengali used the shots' natural vertical rise to create a sense of dread. "It's moody, but it has earth tones," visual effects supervisor Gioffre says. "It's not too far-fetched; a lot of our shots have a sunset or a low sun angle that adds warm light."

The challenge for Svengali's artists—matte painters Vanessa Cheung, Mark Sullivan and Marc-Andre Samson, CG artists Marcus LeVere and Drew Leung and texture artist Federico Rivia—was to transform the clean digital model supplied by DTL into a believable centuries-old palace. "It was a beautiful model," Gioffre says, "but digital structures are just too perfect compared to reality. Even a brand new building will have its share of effects as the elements take their toll, so we began mucking up the

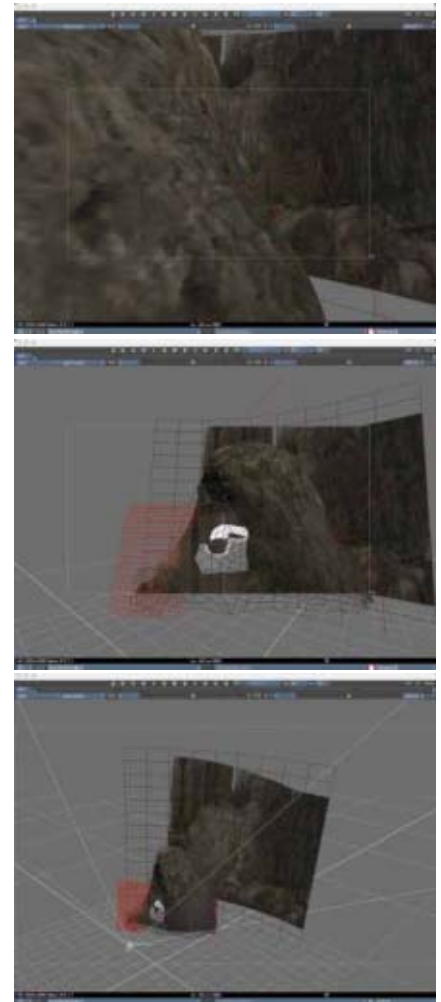
"[The film's iconic hand-shaped mountain range] is really almost a character. A lot of that came from production designer Bill Brzeski, whose sketches went into pre-viz and the artists developed it from there. The mountains, which are in the clouds, had a colorful fantasy look."

—Ron Simonson, *The Forbidden Kingdom's* vfx supervisor

co Gioffre, whose works have graced *Blade Runner*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Apocalypse*, handled a total of seven shots, ranging from digitally removing padding under a stuntman's costume to visualizing the forbidden kingdom. On the lowest of the kingdom's five peaks sits the sinister palace, built of fitted stone, with five-tiered Asian temple style roofs that grow progressively wider towards its base, which plunges some 25 floors down the vertical cliff face.

sharp edges with stains and weathering and shadows from trees and clouds that will cause the surface to look irregular even if it's smooth to create the kind of natural irregularity that would occur over time."

One of the inspired ways Svengali's matte painters added life to the cold stone cliff was to emulate artist Maxfield Parrish's classic painting technique using found objects, gathering actual rocks off Mulholland Drive that scaled correctly for each shot. "If



you find the right piece, a foot-tall rock could be a cliff. We could light it on our stage or just use natural sunlight outdoors in the parking lot to get block textures and photographic pieces. If the texture and cracks and so forth are correct, it won't just bear a resemblance to a large cliff, it will become one."

Of the four fortress shots Svengali worked on, an establishing shot of a light beam coming down from the clouds, heralding the defeat of the evil warlord and the return of the emperor, was perhaps the most beautiful. "It's one of the last two we delivered where the camera actually flies through the mountain passes and around one of the finger mountains, revealing the fortress backlit by a sunset-like glow on the horizon," Gioffre says. "It comes around and through the mist and pulls back to show you the fortress in the surface of the mountain. There's a nifty shot." ■

Lionsgate releases *Forbidden Kingdom* in U.S. theaters on April 18.



# Real World Education: Vancouver's Masters of Digital Media Program

by Ellen Wolff

The 400-person audience that gathered recently at the Great Northern Way Campus in Vancouver, Canada, got to witness something unique in education today. Lining the walls of the campus' hangar-like auditorium were eight-foot scrolls that mapped out the production of six projects being created by the first class of grad students in the school's Masters of Digital Media Program. "It was a remarkable showcase for student work-in-progress," says Dr. Gerri Sinclair, executive director of MDM, the 20-month Master's degree program launched last fall. Sinclair notes that the huge audience contained a sizable contingent of pros from the school's Industry Affiliates program, which includes Electronic Arts, Autodesk, NBC/Universal, Sun Microsystems, Rainmaker Digital and Propaganda Games.

The pros were there to see the first tangible evidence of an innovative partnership between educators, industry and the government of British Columbia.

"This program would not exist without a strong industry lobby," Sinclair explains. "Four years ago, members of B.C.'s new media industry—which includes over 1,100 companies in Vancouver alone—came together to pitch the government on the idea that Vancouver could become the next Digital Hollywood. But they didn't ask for typical economic development investments, like venture capital funding or tax credits. They asked for a graduate school program that could become for our digital entertainment industry what USC [film school] has been for Hollywood."

The government's response included the \$45 million Great Northern Way Campus in Vancouver, run by a partnership among four schools—the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design and the British Columbia Institute of Technology. "The industry lobby asked for a graduate program that trains students for multi-disciplinary

teamwork," notes Sinclair. "So while the first semester of the MDM program is heavily course-based, the second, third and fourth semesters are focused on real-world projects."

By "real-world," Sinclair means projects funded by professional entities, which currently include the British Columbia Department of Fisheries (which commissioned a 3D scientific visualization of an undersea ecosystem) and Canada Line, (which is developing rail transit for the 2010 Olympics). The 21 students in the first MDM class—who come from China, India, Egypt and Cyprus as well as the U.S. and Canada—are working in small teams on six different projects this semester. Sinclair reports, "They have to learn to pitch ideas, to budget, to manage their clients' expectations and ship their project on time."

To train these students to work like pros, the MDM faculty is getting assis-

*continued on page 76*

Great Northern Way Campus,  
Vancouver.





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## Opportunities

continued from page 74

tance from pros themselves. Recent help came in the form of a workshop designed and taught by Electronic Arts' senior VP Glenn Entis and Autodesk Fellow Tom Wujec. As Wujec explains, "Glenn had developed a pre-pro workshop that helps EA teams clarify their work process by using a series of images literally drawn on the wall.\* We both believe in 'making ideas visible.' At Autodesk, we'd been using similar approaches to help our customers with their development processes. We realized that on a general level, creative teams face similar problems of collaboration—whether they're making a movie, or an automobile or running shoes. Among students, what's often missing is that they don't have a lot of experience with creative collaboration. In some ways that represents a lack of maturity. They may know that something has to be great, but it also has to be great by next Thursday!"

The workshop that Entis and Wujec adapted for the MDM students involved a series of exercises—from

breaking down processes on 3 x 5 index cards to

improvising scenes—to help them tackle their projects in ways that recognized the limitations of time and budget. As Entis observes, "They have clients outside the school that have put cash down and hired their team to solve a problem. At the end of the term, they can't simply say 'We didn't ship your project, but we learned a lot.' That doesn't work!"

When the workshop concluded, recalls Wujec, "The walls were papered with eight-foot scrolls of paper. They helped the students not just with their animations, but helped them understand timelines and the potential pitfalls that are common to almost every project. That's especially important, because students feel they can do anything and everything."

The first class of MDM degree candidates will have paid summer internships when they complete these projects, and then will pursue two more real-world projects next fall and in spring '09. As Sinclair remarks, "We're not just modeling one real-world experience. We're modeling it *three times!*"

Entis considers MDM's team-based production approach to education "a grand experiment. There are Masters programs in different elements of media and production but things are changing so rapidly that the challenge for educators is to figure out how to prepare students for the industries that exist today." Entis and Wujec plan to return to the Great Northern Way Campus to see how the students are proceeding. Entis says he'll use one measure for sure: "I'll look at the scrolls on the walls." ■

**Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in education, animation and visual effects.**

\* For examples of Electronic Arts pre-pro exercises, see **Game Design Workshop: Designing, Prototyping and Playtesting Games** by Tracy Fullerton (Morgan Kaufman Press, 2008).



Dr. Gerri Sinclair



Tom Wujec

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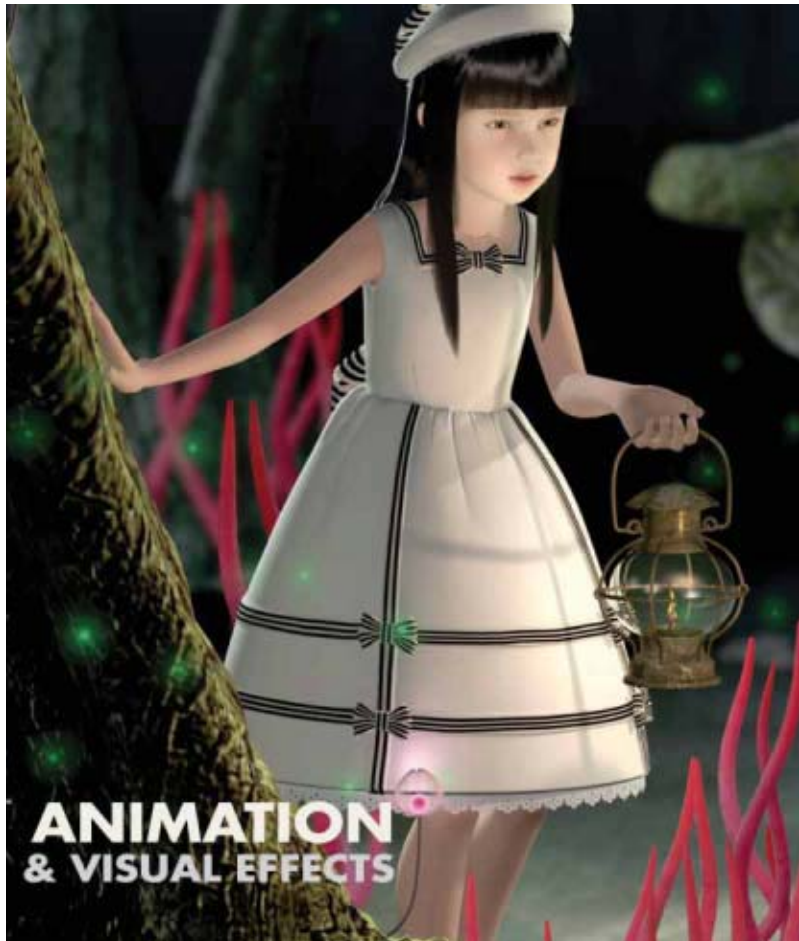


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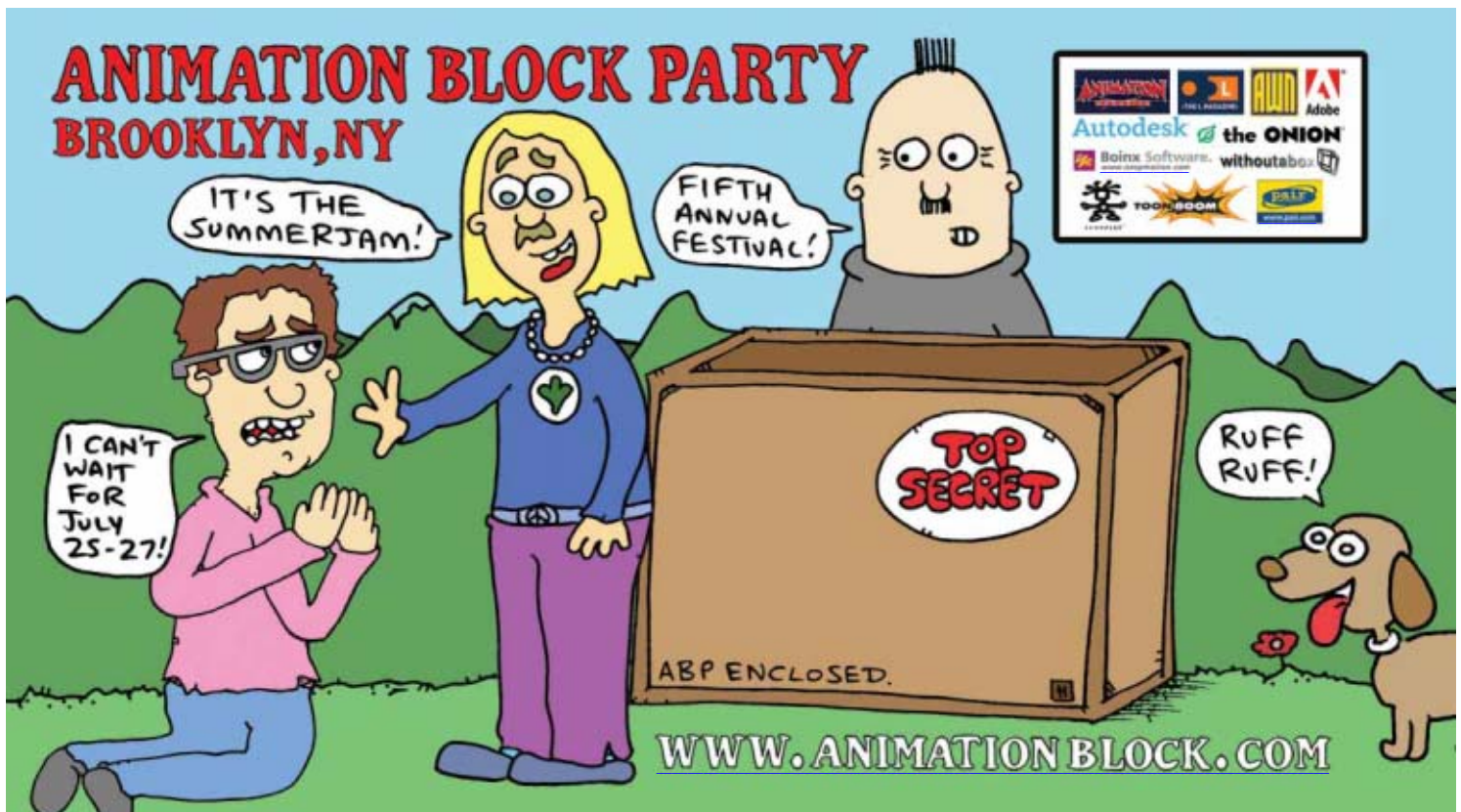
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# IMAGINATION

## A Day in the Life

**F**resh from a whirlwind festival tour, brothers and creators Eric and Jeffrey Leiser of So. Cal.-based **Albino Fawn Productions** sent us these incriminating photos of just what went on in the wee hours of night while they shot their recent film, *Imagination* (now on DVD!). To learn more about the boys, their film and their up-coming stop-mo project, *Twilight Park*, visit [www.albinofawn.com](http://www.albinofawn.com).

**1 a.m.** Another haunting set piece under construction—Hey! No peeking!



**2 a.m.** One frame down, one million to go.



**11 p.m.** The nocturnal filmmakers get to work.



**3:30 a.m.** Eric, Nathan and Max Winston do some hardcore puppeteering.



**3:12 a.m.** DP Nathan Meier, composer/co-writer Jeffrey Leiser and bro Eric act natural. Or...not...



**8:27 a.m.** The morning critique; *Imagination* lead actor Ed Gildersleeve starts off.

**3 a.m.** Writer/director Eric Leiser whistles while he works.



**4 a.m.** "Guys, c'mon, the set is over here!!"



**10 a.m.** Play them keys, keyboard man! That's your title, right Jeffrey?

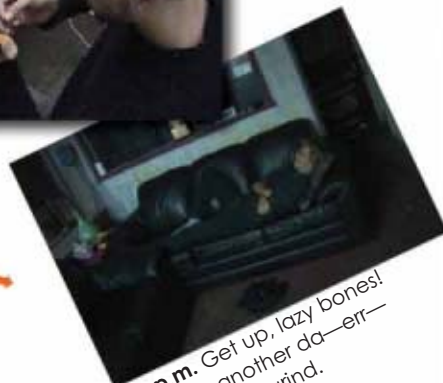
**8 a.m.** Sleep deprivation leads Nathan to strange eating habits during the shoot...



**3 p.m.** On location—you can never have too many spooky trees!



**10 p.m.** Get up, lazy bones! Time for another da—err—night on the grind.



**Noon.** *Imagination*'s young starlet Jessi Haddad pretties up the blue screen.



Photos by Nathan Meier, Dave Toda and Eric Leiser.



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